

FROM THE SAME AUTHOR OF 'OUT OF HAND IN A FOREIGN LAND' WHICH YOU ALSO DIDN'T READ...

"Avoiding carnivores in the Kenyan countryside, getting mugged in Brazil, entering a country at war for a single pint of beer, meeting the gangsters of a Ugandan botanical garden, or simply struggling to urinate in front of Peruvian drug dealers. It all comes with getting off the tourist trail and away from the usual holiday resorts.

Stephen Koral has a dream to travel to a hundred countries before he kicks the bucket. Now in his mid-thirties while juggling adult matters like finances and keeping his fiery wife happy, Koral finds the easy to travel countries are in the rear-view mirror, and the new destinations have become increasingly harder for a British traveller to adapt to in the relentless pursuit of seeing more of the world"

**NEW
BOOK**
BY STEPHEN
KORAL



**"Good
and that"**



Amazon review

Available at [amazon](https://www.amazon.com) as a paperback or ebook

CONTENTS



32 Postcards from Fairyland



40 Garth Marengi returns



20 Carolingian ghosts



07 Coronation reaper



42 Thoughtography on trial



10 Tatooine for real?



FORTEAN TIMES 433

Why fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE
70

STRANGE DAYS

A digest of the worldwide weird, including: British big cat DNA, postal time-slips, coronation oddities, royal ghosts and more...

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 13 SCIENCE | 24 ALIEN ZOO |
| 14 ARCHÆOLOGY | 25 THE CONSPIRASPHERE |
| 16 CLASSICAL CORNER | 27 MYTHCONCEPTIONS |
| 20 GHOSTWATCH | 30 THE UFO FILES |

FEATURES



32 COVER STORY POSTCARDS FROM FAIRYLAND

NINA ANTONIA takes a sentimental journey around the British Isles in search of places linked with the fairy folk and explores the way these enchanted land-

scapes were captured in thousands of postcards celebrating, and sometimes creating, our folkloric heritage.

40 TOME SWEET TOME

The Dreamweaver is back! In *TerrorTome*, his first major work since the late 1980s, British horror legend Garth Marengi has produced a work of characteristically distressing fiction. With the novel now available in paperback, **BOB FISCHER** attempts an in-depth interview – but soon finds himself rather out of his depth...

42 REVISITING ARTHUR C CLARKE'S WORLD OF STRANGE POWERS

In 1985, Arthur C Clarke was back in our living rooms with a follow-up to his Mysterious World series, this time focusing on such wild talents as premonitions, telepathy and stigmata. **RYAN SHIRLOW** continues his reassessment of a fortean TV classic.

FORUM

- 51 Something to crow about **ROB GANDY**
 52 Chatting to Charles FORTAN **RYAN SHIRLOW**
 54 AI, art and forteana **ANDREW MAY**

REGULARS

- | | | |
|--------------|----------------|-------------------|
| 02 EDITORIAL | 65 LETTERS | 71 PHENOMENOMIX |
| 57 REVIEWS | 70 READER INFO | 72 STRANGE DEATHS |

Fortean Times

EDITOR

DAVID SUTTON
drsutton@forteantimes.com

FOUNDING EDITORS

BOB RICKARD (ft-bobrickard@mail.com)
PAUL SIEVEKING (sieveking@forteantimes.com)

NEWS EDITOR

IAN SIMMONS (simmons@forteantimes.com)

ART DIRECTOR

ETIENNE GILFILLAN (etienne@forteantimes.com)

BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR

DAVID V BARRETT (dvbarrett@forteantimes.com)

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

ABIGAIL MASON

RESIDENT CARTOONIST

HUNT EMERSON

PRODUCTION MANAGER

LEE BOYMAN (lee.boyman@metropolis.co.uk)

ADVERTISING

BEN LORTON (ben.lorton@metropolis.co.uk)

FT ON THE INTERNET

www.forteantimes.com
www.facebook.com/forteantimes

FORTEAN TIMES is produced for Diamond Publishing Limited, a member of the Metropolis Group, by WILD TALENTS LTD. Postal address: Fortean Times, PO BOX 1200, Whitstable CT11 9RH.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 issues: UK £50.58; Europe £62; USA £70;
Rest of the world £70

CHANGE YOUR ADDRESS, RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION OR REPORT PROBLEMS:

hello@metropolis.co.uk / +44 (0) 208 752 8195

LICENSING & SYNDICATION

FORTEAN TIMES is available for international licensing and syndication
Commercial Managing Director
David Saunders TEL: +44 (0) 208 752 8195
david.saunders@metropolis.co.uk

DISTRIBUTION

DISTRIBUTED IN UK, IRELAND AND WORLDWIDE

by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU.

Email: mfccommunications@futurenet.com

Speciality store distribution by **Worldwide Magazine**
Distribution Ltd, Tel: 0121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 78 12720121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 78 1272

DIAMOND PUBLISHING LTD.

PUBLISHED BY DIAMOND PUBLISHING LIMITED.
A MEMBER OF THE METROPOLIS GROUP.

Fortean Times (ISSN 0308-5899 USPS 023-728) is published 13 times a year with the additional issue (Christmas Special) published in November by Diamond Publishing Limited, 2nd Floor, Saunders House, 52-53 The Mall, Ealing, W5 3AT, United Kingdom. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413-4037, USA. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. **US POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Fortean Times, World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413-4037, USA.

© Diamond Publishing Limited: JUNE 2023



COVER ILLUSTRATION
ETIENNE GILFILLAN

PRINTED BY PRECISION
COLOUR PRINTING

EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

RIGHT CHARLIES

Welcome to our July issue, in which you'll find – among other things – our coverage of the more fortean aspects of the recent Coronation, from the spiritual and religious aspects of the service to an apparent visit from the Grim Reaper (or was it Klaus Schwab in disguise?) and the revival of an odd tradition of bun-throwing in Abingdon. Noel Rooney takes a look at the slightly disappointing response from the Conspirasphere, while Alan Murdie thinks that the future for ghosts under Charles III looks promising (especially given the numerous spectres associated with the two previous Carolingian monarchs).

Artificial Intelligence has also been much in the news, and in this issue's Forum section two of our regular writers come at the subject from different perspectives in search of answers to some pressing questions. Can AI help us unravel longstanding mysteries? Does it do a convincing impression of Charles Fort? And should our contributors be worried about being replaced by chatbots in the near future?

GOING POSTAL

Our cover story, by Nina Antonia, takes us back to a simpler age and a slower method of communication in the form of the humble picture postcard. Like our resident deltiologist, Dr Jan Bondeson, Nina has been bitten by the collecting bug, and here shares some of her favourite finds from the subgenre of fairy postcards, ranging from picturesque scenes of 'fairy glens' to sometimes unassuming places with names evoking hobs, boggarts and pixies (not to mention Wiccan legend Gerald Gardner, pictured above at the Witches Mill, Castletown, on the Isle of Man). We hope that you



enjoy this gentle amble around the British Isles in search of the origins of fairy postcards and the vanished world they now evoke.

Staying with a postal theme, we also present our latest round-up of literal snail mail – letters and postcards that have in some instances taken over a

century to reach their destination, fated never to be read by their intended recipients.

Which reminds us to say a big thank you to our merry band of clipsters, who continue to defy the vagaries of the world's postal system to send envelopes and packets of newspaper clippings bearing weird news from around the globe. Keep them

coming! A particular shout-out goes to our regular correspondent Len Watson of Queensland, Australia, whose bulging envelopes decorated with colourful

stamps, newspaper cartoons and bizarre stickers (pictured here) always raise a smile. As WH Auden wrote: "And none will hear the postman's knock/ Without a quickening of the heart"; it's a sentiment that holds true here at Fortean Towers. If you want to join in, turn to p.70 for more info on how to become an FT clipster.

ERRATA

FT432:43: In "The Legend of Bloody Mary", a typo crept into a line concerning the 'Troxler effect', which

should have read: "Here, the brain when overstimulated will tune out non-relevant parts, filling in the gaps and creating what you expect to see from a jumble of visual stimuli."



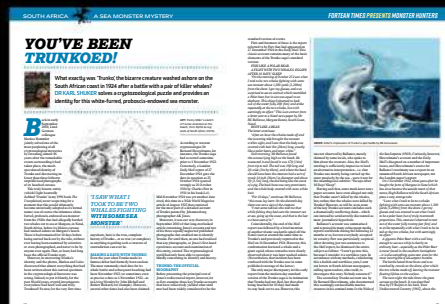


TIME TO TOP UP THE MONSTER METER?



From the archives of **FORTEAN TIMES**, the world's foremost journal of strange phenomena, comes a new collection exploring the world of cryptozoology – the search for unknown animals.

Join us on expeditions to far-flung Mongolia to find the dreaded **DEATH WORM** of the Gobi Desert, to the Congo in search of a **LIVING DINOSAUR** and to Tajikistan on the trail of **TERRIFYING APE-MEN**. Explore the wilds of the USA on the track of **BIGFOOT** and the South Carolina **LIZARD MAN**, or venture to the marshes of Sweden to investigate sightings of **GIANT SERPENTS**. And sign up for closer-to-home hunts for **NESSIE** and **BRITAIN'S MYSTERY BIG CATS**, including the infamous 'Essex Lion'. **MONSTER HUNTERS** takes readers on an exciting round-the-world quest to track the most amazing, elusive and sometimes unbelievable crypto-creatures. Plus, the collection includes an introduction and updates and commentary on each article by renowned cryptozoologist **DR KARL SHUKER**.



IN SHOPS NOW OR ORDER ONLINE AT: SHOP.FORTEANTIMES.COM



A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

PROOF OF ALIEN BIG CATS IN BRITAIN?



LEFT: A sample of black hair caught on a barbed wire fence on a farm in Gloucestershire where there reportedly had been unusual predatory activity.

British animal. At the time the team also took swabs that went to Warwick University for DNA testing, but these produced no results.

However, while this might look like crucial breakthrough evidence that the UK has at least one feral leopard loose in the countryside, it does come with some serious flaws that undermine its credibility.

Firstly, the location of the farm where the hair was found is being withheld, and while this is understandable, as the farmer is not going to welcome an influx of enthusiastic cat hunters, it does reduce the value of the evidence as it is not possible for other researchers to verify the filmmakers' story.

More importantly, though, the laboratory that carried out the DNA analysis has apparently also requested anonymity, which is highly unusual. Warwick University were happy to acknowledge carrying out the previous negative tests and Durham and Copenhagen Universities were also willing to be named as having carried out an ABC hair analysis for the Centre for Fortean Zoology (CFZ) in 2010. This, too, identified a leopard as the source of the hair, which came from an identified location, Huddesford Woods near Woolserly in Devon. The anonymity of the lab significantly weakens the DNA result as evidence. It means it is impossible to gauge the credibility of the results, as the quality of the laboratory is important here; a small

THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE LEOPARD

While reports of alien big cats (ABCs) in the UK have been accumulating steadily since the 1960s, leading many wildlife experts to conclude that there is an unacknowledged population of large predatory felids living in our countryside, concrete evidence of their existence has been frustratingly difficult to secure. Now, though, a team of documentary makers are claiming that they have DNA evidence that leopards are indeed living wild in the British countryside. This would tie in with the identification of ABCs as "black panthers", since leopards are one of the two big cat species that have a black, or melanistic, form, and most of the British big cat sightings are of black animals.

Dragonfly Films, who have produced a documentary on ABCs, *Panthera Britannia*, claim to have retrieved hairs believed to be from a big cat from a barbed wire fence on an

The laboratory that carried out the DNA analysis has requested anonymity

unnamed Gloucestershire farm where there had been some "unusual predatory activity". They say that this involved a sheep kill in 2022, at a time when there had been several ABC reports in the local area, and was from a farm where ABC evidence had been previously found in 2017.

According to Matthew Everett from Dragonfly Films: "It was a large lamb... at least 35 or 40 kilos [77 to 88lb]. There were what looked like two canine puncture marks on the skin. At the time we thought, well, it could just be dog worrying – we weren't really sure. There was wool sprawled across the ground, as though some sort of struggle

had taken place. We checked the perimeter for access points, and there weren't any. But there was a wall that was very high where something could have jumped down quite easily. And that's when we saw the wool and hair on the barbed wire fence."

The film makers then submitted the black hair for DNA analysis at a "top forensic laboratory", and report that it came back with a 99.9 per cent match to the leopard *Panthera pardus*, based on the mitochondrial DNA found in cells attached to the hair. Mitochondria are energy-generating organelles found in all cells and have their own DNA independent of the DNA found in a cell's nucleus. They say that this evidence is backed up by tooth pit analysis carried out in 2017 by the Royal Agricultural University on a jawbone from a sheep carcass from the same farm that showed bite marks on the bones likely to be from the molar and premolar of a big cat rather than any acknowledged



OUT OF THIS WORLD

Planet Nine from Outer Space

PAGE 10



POSTAL TIME-SLIPS

The letter that took over 100 years to arrive

PAGE 14



PIEBALD POOH

Black and white and bear all over

PAGE 22



PHOTOS: CINCINNATI ANIMAL CARE



ABOVE LEFT: Cincinnati's cocaine cat was spotted up a tree in the city's Oakley neighbourhood. ABOVE RIGHT: The twitchy ABC turned out to be a serval and was treated at a local animal charity before finding a new home at Cincinnati Zoo.

private forensic laboratory with no experience of animal DNA analysis would give the results less credibility than if they were produced by a major university lab with an extensive track record in this work. Indeed, having an analysis from only one laboratory also weakens the evidence; ideally, they should have conformation from two independent labs to rule out errors, as the CFZ did in 2010.

Without the ability to independently verify the location of the sheep kill or the DNA results, we are entirely reliant on the filmmakers' word that either of them exists. The main reason that the evidence has been released seems to be that Dragonfly Films are seeking a platform for the latest version of their *Panthera Britannica* documentary (previous versions are available on streaming services), so have a vested interest in hyping the results, and this cannot help but raise questions.

This is not to say that evidence does not exist to confirm the presence of a leopard in Gloucestershire; indeed, the previous CFZ findings suggest that this is quite possible. However, until the filmmakers

release the full details, allowing other researchers to independently verify the source of the hair and identify the lab that did the DNA analysis, this latest evidence cannot yet be accepted as credible proof of the existence of a Gloucestershire leopard. *lbc.co.uk*, *discoverwildlife.com*, 12 May 2023; *dailystar.co.uk*, 16 Oct 2016.

COCAINE CAT

In the US, authorities are having better luck capturing their ABCs. On 28 January, dog wardens in Cincinnati, Ohio, received multiple reports of a leopard on the loose in the Oakley neighbourhood, one of which came with phone camera footage of a cat with a spotted golden coat and large ears up a tree. Believing it to be a savannah house cat, a breed of pet cat that originated from cross breeding a wild serval cat with a domestic Siamese, they sent wardens out to capture the animal.

After something of a struggle, they caught the cat and took it to an animal shelter where they tested its DNA to determine exactly what species it was. Rather than a savannah cat, the DNA revealed that it was a pure-bred African serval, which,

although they are allowed to be kept as pets in neighbouring Indiana and Kentucky, are illegal in Ohio.

"These types of animals are considered dangerous. They are on the dangerous wild list for Ohio", said Troy Taylor, chief dog warden of Hamilton County. The cat sustained a broken leg during its capture, so the animal shelter ran several further tests before treating it and were surprised when toxicology revealed that the serval had a significant amount of cocaine in its system, which may have accounted for its twitchy demeanour when confronted by the dog wardens. How the cat had come to ingest the drug in the first place remains a mystery.

While the serval was not quite as dangerous as the drug crazed bear in the recent film *Cocaine Bear*, Taylor said that "after talking to the cat expert, he said we did a great job and were also pretty lucky because this cat could've shredded us apart and killed us." Once recovered, the serval was rehomed at Cincinnati Zoo. The owner was eventually traced, but, somewhat surprisingly, will not face charges relating to his pet's escapade. *metro.co.uk*, 8 Mar 2023.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

IT IS TIME ONCE AGAIN, IT SEEMS, FOR THE DEVIL TO FLOURISH

Irish Times, 30 Sept 2022.

Ghost is nicked

Daily Star, 19 Nov 2022.

ALAN PARTRIDGE'S SEMEN COULD HELP SAVE RARE PONY BREED

Horse & Hound Magazine, 18 Mar 2023.

Millionaire sacked her male nanny after lobster injury row

D.Mail, 16 Feb 2023.

UK PUBLIC WARNED NOT TO EAT BARONET SEMI-SOFT CHEESES AFTER DEATH

Guardian, 25 Mar 2023.

Woman shot in chest while fighting another woman with pogo stick

mercurynews.com, 30 Mar 2023.

CORONATION SIGNS AND PORTENTS

MYSTIC CORONATION

While several European countries retain their royal families, when a new king or queen accedes to the throne, it is accompanied by a relatively simple ceremony. Britain is almost unique in staging a full ritual coronation, with the only other nation doing so in the modern world being Tonga in the South Pacific. For the coronation of King Charles III, there was a greater emphasis on the mystic and ritual aspects of the occasion than when Queen Elizabeth II was crowned 70 years ago. Particularly notable was the design of the coronation invitation, created by heraldic artist Andrew Jamieson, which featured a prominent “Green Man” foliate head and a design of flowers that had various symbolic meanings. This prompted much discussion about the “pagan” nature of the invitation as the Green Man has a popular reputation as a pre-Christian deity who was sneaked into churches by secret followers of the old gods. This, however, is a relatively modern view of foliate heads, which have a long history as church decoration, and there is virtually no sign of them historically being used in any other context. They were long seen as images of god’s natural bounty, rather than as entities in their own right, only being dubbed “the Green Man” by Lady Raglan in a March 1939 article in the journal *Folklore* that speculatively connected foliate heads to separate folkloric green men in things like pub names. Nonetheless, it was notable that Charles III was reaching back to deeply resonant mediæval imagery for his coronation. His invitation also contained symbolic groupings of wildflowers, animals and heraldic creatures, emphasising the mythic and mystic aspects of the coronation in a way not seen at his mother’s.

The media also reported extensively on the transport of the Stone of Scone, or Stone of Destiny, from Scotland to Westminster for the coronation, another element in the mystic legitimacy of the occasion. This stone, originally used for crowning Kings of Scotland, was seized by Edward I in 1296 and installed in the coronation throne in Westminster, only being returned to the Scots in 1996. It is alleged to be the stone on which Jacob rested his head (as related in the Old Testament), although geological research has revealed it to originate in the Scone area. At the heart of the coronation, though, was the anointing of the King, which was carried out by the Archbishop of Canterbury away from the view of the TV cameras; this, rather than the actual placing of the crown on his head, was the crucial ritual in the crowning of the King as it signifies his appointment by God. The anointing oil was created using olives harvested from two groves on the Mount of Olives, at the Monastery of Mary Magdalene and the Monastery of the Ascension, perfumed with sesame, rose, jasmine, cinnamon, neroli, benzoin, amber and orange blossom and then consecrated by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophilos III, and the Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem, Hosam Naoum. The use of the consecrated oil signifies the King’s sacred link to God and his right to reign as a King, appointed by God himself, which sets the British Coronation apart from all other remaining European crowning rituals and goes back to the earliest known coronations in the 10th century. *theguardian.com*, 3 Mar; *townandcountrymag.com*, 29 Apr; *independent.co.uk*, 5 Apr 2023.



TOP: The Coronation invitation with its Green Man. **CENTRE LEFT:** The Stone of Scone leaves Scotland. **CENTRE RIGHT:** The silver urn of anointing oil. **ABOVE:** The Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, mixes the unique oil, which was created from olives from the Mount of Olives and various essential oils.



JONATHAN BRADY – WPA POOL / GETTY IMAGES

GRIM REAPER?

Sharp-eyed viewers of the Coronation reported spotting a potentially dark omen during the ceremony. Just as the procession finished entering Westminster Abbey, a cloaked and hooded figure carrying a long-handled implement could be briefly seen crossing the doorway through which the King and Queen had recently passed. Many interpreted this apparition as the Grim Reaper carrying a scythe, and potentially signifying a short reign for the King, while some viewed it as an intervention from beyond the grave by the late Princess Diana to cast a pall over a ceremony at which she should have been crowned Queen instead of Camilla. Commenting on the apparition, Westminster Abbey explained that it was, in fact, one of the Abbey vergers, who wear monastic style robes on official occasions, who was sweeping water from a doorway after a rain shower. [dailymail.co.uk](https://www.dailymail.co.uk), 6 May 2023.



FLY-PAST UFO

Inclement weather meant that the official Coronation fly-past was truncated, but the RAF Red Arrows were still able to perform, and Simon Balson, 59, taking pictures of them from his 13th floor apartment in Limehouse, east London, believes he also captured a UFO, buzzing the flight. "The weather was bad so there were no birds in the air, and I couldn't really see the planes, so I didn't check the photos until later. When I did, though, I spotted this weird object and just thought 'what the hell is that?'" I enhanced the image and tried to increase the spec to see what it was. It looks like a floating acorn or something," said Balson. As is increasingly the case with UFO sightings at major public events, it is likely that the combination of escaped helium balloons, large numbers of cameras and the ease with which photos can be enhanced is likely to be the explanation rather than any anomalous intrusion. [mirror.co.uk](https://www.mirror.co.uk), 7 May 2023.



SIMON BALSON / SWNS



SIDELINES

INDIAN JARNDYCE

The high court in Kolkata, India, has finally concluded the country's longest running legal case after 72 years. The case, a challenge to the 1948 ruling liquidating the debt-ridden Berhampore Bank, was filed in 1951 and almost all the original litigants are now dead. In his ruling, Justice Ravi Krishnan Kapur confirmed the original 1948 ruling and declared the case irreversibly concluded. India's legal system is notoriously slow, and the Kolkata court alone still has two outstanding civil cases in progress dating from 1952. *Irish Times*, 23 Jan 2023.

DRAINING

Lyndsey Kennedy, 33, was pulled from a storm drain in Delray Beach, Florida, in January after a stand-off with police. Kennedy had previously been hauled out of a storm drain in Delray Beach in March 2021 (FT409:12) and again in Texas that May. Her mother explained to police officers that Kennedy does "odd things". *Metro*, 27 Jan 2023.

BABY DRIVER

A state trooper following an erratic driver in Utah turned on his siren and signalled for the car to pull over after seeing it driving slowly and weaving across the highway. The driver promptly obeyed, but when the officer approached the vehicle, he found it was a five-year-old boy who said that he had left home after arguing with his mother. *Queensland Times*, 7 May 2020.

SAVING THEIR BACON

When the opticians Specsavers expanded into Holland, brand consultants advised them to change the shop's name to "Optiprima" as "Spek" means bacon in Dutch. However, after a hesitant start, they reverted to Specsavers as the Dutch find the idea of an optician's called "Baconsavers" funny. *D.Star*, 7 Jan 2023.



MARTIN ROSS

Q VS QUEEN

Was the late Queen Elizabeth II's death in fact an extraterrestrial sign that triggered a failed coup?

In December 2022, German authorities rounded up a small group of 24 QAnon influenced "Reichsbürger" conspiracy theorists under the leadership of an elderly minor aristocrat, Heinrich XIII Prinz Reuss, on terror charges after they discovered plans to storm the Bundestag, Germany's national parliament, and take politicians hostage. It seems that the trigger for their action was the death of Queen Elizabeth II on 8 September, which the Reichsbürgers viewed as a sign from a shadowy group they called "The Alliance", possibly extraterrestrial in origin, signalling that they were coming to replace the illegitimate elected government, which was a tool of the German "Deep State" controlled by evil beings that drank the blood of children.

The group, which included former soldiers, a former member of the Bundestag for the far-Right AfD party, an astrologer and a celebrity chef (see FT429:24) had amassed caches of weapons as well as 120kg (265lb) of gold and some €400,000 (£352,125) in cash to support their putsch. However, when The Alliance did not follow through and back their rising, and they were arrested instead, the Reichsbürgers became increasingly frustrated and started to question whether some of their leaders had been lying to them. Germany's *Die Zeit* newspaper said that the group, which dates back to the 1980s and reportedly has some 20,000 members, had been given extra impetus by Germany's anti-lockdown movement, which shared its questioning of the wider role of the state, and had been meeting regularly since 2021, often at a country hunting lodge owned by Mr Reuss. They had apparently been inspired by the "Reich Citizen" idea, which is similar to the US's "Sovereign Citizens" and the UK's "Freemen on the Land", all of which use arcane and imaginative legal confections to claim that national governments are illegitimate and that individual



LEFT: Heinrich XIII Prinz Reuss, leader of Germany's Reichsbürgers. BELOW LEFT: Roman Didulo, the self-proclaimed QAnon Queen of Canada.

The trigger for their action was the death of Queen Elizabeth



rights take precedence over government laws. This also feeds into the QAnon belief system, that brings in the deep state, child sacrifice and other extreme fringe conjectures.

Indeed, QAnon followers have long placed Queen Elizabeth at the heart of the global Satanic conspiracy, and many followers openly rejoiced at her death. "May she burn in hell for eternity," said one QAnon account on Telegram, while another said, "So happy! The evil witch is dead." An early "Q drop" targeted the Queen, saying "Who is the Queen of England? How

long in power? With power comes corruption. What happened to Diana?" and Q went on to call her, "evil", "corrupt" and part of the satanic paedophile cult running the world. QAnon also took up David Icke's idea that the Queen was a member of a shapeshifting extraterrestrial lizard elite (as depicted on the cover of FT129 in December 1999), along with, among others, George W Bush, Henry Kissinger, Bill and Hillary Clinton, Bob Hope and country singer Boxcar Willie, with one QAnon poster on Telegram saying: "A lizard gone, planet Earth is having a celebration."

In 2019, QAnon's own queen, Romana Didulo, the self-proclaimed "Queen of Canada" (FT409:8-9), claimed that recent pictures of the Queen were faked because she already had been executed; many QAnoners claim this was following a military tribunal because she had Princess Diana murdered after she learned of a blackmail scheme involving convicted paedophile Jeffrey Epstein. "Elizabeth II, was shown the photo of the true and real Queen before she was executed," said Didulo. As with any global event perceived as vaguely significant, many QAnon members took the Queen's death as the sign that the "storm" that will bring about Donald Trump's return to power and see global elites

being brought to justice was about to begin, pointing out that she died 1,776 days after Q first posted. "The Queen announcement is the beginning! Let's go!" one posted, while another spotted that there were 10 days between the day

of the Queen's death and her funeral, which they concluded were the "10 days of darkness" that Q predicted would happen when Trump's return was imminent. *vice.com*, 8 Sept 2022; *D.Telegraph*, 4 May 2023.





FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS | Cult crimes, Gimp return and a mystery solved

KENYAN CULT [FT432:4]

Following the arrest of self-proclaimed pastor Paul Nthenge Mackenzie and the discovery of bodies in woodland belonging to his Good News International Church, the death toll has now risen to 201, but a total of 600 people belonging to Mackenzie's cult have been reported missing. Some of the victims were followers of Mackenzie who were allegedly encouraged to starve themselves to death so that they could "meet Jesus"; however, most of the bodies exhumed so far are of children, who, according to survivors, were killed first, having been ordered "to fast in the sun so they would die faster". Post-mortems, though, have shown that many of the children died from suffocation and beatings rather than starvation, and that some were buried while still alive. In addition, the post-mortems have found that some of the bodies were missing organs, which has raised suspicions that Mackenzie was involved in forced organ harvesting. An affidavit filed to a Nairobi court by chief inspector Martin Munene said, "Post-mortem reports have established missing organs in some of the bodies of victims who have been exhumed," and that it is "believed that trade in human body organs has been well coordinated, involving several players", although no details of who these might be were given. In addition, Ezekiel Odero, a high-profile televangelist, has been arrested in connection with the case, having received "huge cash transactions", allegedly from Mackenzie's followers who sold their property on his instructions. Twenty-nine survivors have been found, many in an extremely frail state, but some were so convinced that the end of the world was coming that they refused help. This included a man in his 40s who, according to rescuers, "said he didn't need any saving, and that he was in his senses and he knows what he's doing and he should be left



alone. He even called us enemies of him going to Heaven." Despite his protests, the man was taken to hospital with other survivors. Authorities continue to search the woodland burial site for other victims and the death toll is expected to rise still further. *BBC News, 25 Apr, 14 May; theguardian.com, 2+9 May 2023.*

SOMERSET GIMP [FT428:26]

Following his arrest in October, it seemed that the Somerset Gimp's reign of terror was finally over after several years of scaring people with his rubber suit and bizarre behaviour in and around the villages of Claverham and Yatton. However, he seems to be back to his old tricks. A woman driving alone at night on 8 May encountered him on Accommodation Road in the small village of Bleadon, near his old stamping ground. "As soon as I got over the first railway bridge, I noticed something on the ground which I thought was a badger," she said. "As I got closer I could see it wasn't, but in fact a man with a mask on, who was crawling and writhing on the ground." She described him as being dressed entirely in black latex with white crosses over his eyes. The woman called the police, who arrived swiftly and detained the man, later issuing a statement saying: "Officers arrived at the scene three minutes after the call was received and located and detained a man aged in his 30s nearby. The man has previously been arrested on suspicion of causing a public nuisance in relation to incidents

LEFT: The crustacean responsible for the mystery holes on the ocean floor.

in the Cleeve, Claverham and Yatton areas in October last year. He remains under investigation for these incidents." *metro.co.uk, 9 May 2023.*

MARINE MYSTERY HOLES [FT425:25]

The source of the sets of identical, slit-shaped holes punched in straight lines across the ocean floor that mystified researchers in both the submerged Mid-Atlantic Ridge mountains and in the Bering Sea between Alaska and Russia has been identified. Researchers in the Bering Sea onboard the German research vessel *Sonne* attempted to find the creator of the holes by sifting through several hundred images captured by a camera towed above the seafloor. Various animals were photographed near the holes, but most were easily eliminated. Then, Angelika Brandt, a team member from the Senckenberg Museum, spotted a small crustacean and shouted: "It's that! That's the maker!" She ran out of the room, returning with an external hard drive from which she showed a video shot by a colleague 40 years before. This showed a mærid amphipod, a kind of crustacean, from Antarctica, filmed in captivity while digging a burrow in the sand in its aquarium. It was carefully shovelling sand out of a hole with its large front appendages and heaping it in a neat pile without letting it slide back in, producing a hole exactly like those seen on the ocean floor. This amphipod was almost identical to the one seen in the Bering Sea holes, although the exact species has yet to be determined. "When I saw the animal sitting in that hole, it was really a déjà vu moment," Brandt says. Julia Sigwart, also from the Senckenberg Museum, added: "It's amazing how much activity there is in and on the seafloor." *theguardian.com, 22 May 2023.*

SIDELINES

CRISP CALAMITY

Dawn Sagar from Oswestry, Shropshire, found a perfect heart-shaped crisp in her pack of Walkers ready salted, so took a picture of it and sent it to friends on social media, but had eaten it by the time they replied to alert her to the competition the crisp-makers were holding to find the best heart-shaped crisp, with a £100,000 prize. "It's fine, isn't it," she said. "I was gutted at the time... but it's just one of those things." *BBC News, 24 Feb 2023.*

DRUNKEN APOCALYPSE

While driving drunk, Daniella Leis, 26, from London, Ontario, in Canada crashed her father's Ford Fusion into a house, rupturing a gas main and causing an explosion that destroyed four houses and injured seven people. Embers from the inferno went on to start additional fires that resulted in the entire neighbourhood having to be evacuated and gas and water services being shut off. As a result, Leis is now suing the bar that served her the drinks as she holds them responsible for her behaviour. *D.Mirror, 26 Jan 2023.*

TRAIN IN VAIN

After spending €258m (£228m) on designing 31 trains for the FEVE line, which runs through the areas of Asturias and Cantabria, Spanish railways have discovered that the vehicles are too large to fit through its tunnels. Dating back to the 19th century, the FEVE line runs on a gauge narrower than the standard used elsewhere in Spain, something the designers failed to account for. Fortunately, construction of the trains had not started, but the redesign will delay their introduction by several years. *eandt.thetiet.org, 9 Feb 2023.*

ROBO RITUAL

The Irinjadappilly Sree Krishna Temple in Kerala, India, has introduced a robotic elephant to replace live elephants in its rituals. Donated by People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India, it is intended to enable them to hold events "in a cruelty-free manner". Many temples in Kerala use decorated elephants in processions and rituals, where they can be frightened by crowds and fireworks, and PETA has urged them all to switch to animatronic replacements. *BBC News, 28 Feb 2023.*



SIDELINES...

KETCHUP CATCH-UP

After being swept out to sea while making repairs to his boat, Elvis Francois, 47, from St Martin, Colombia, drifted for 24 days before being rescued by the Colombian navy. He had survived his ordeal by eating tomato ketchup, garlic powder and stock cubes. On hearing about this, ketchup manufacturers Heinz launched a social media search to find Elvis, and having tracked him down, gave him a new boat. *D.Star*, 20 Jan 2023; *dailymail.co.uk*, 28 Feb 2023.

ART PANIC

Police forced their way into an art gallery in Soho, London, after receiving reports of a woman slumped unconscious on a table. Instead, they found an artwork by sculptor Mark Jenkins called "Kristina" featuring a figure made of packing tape and foam filler dressed in tights and a hoodie, face down in a bowl of soup. Hannah Blakemore who works at the Laz Emporium gallery said that she "came down to find the door off its hinges and two confused police officers." Jenkins's hyper-realistic human figures have frequently been mistaken for living people, but he said he had never had police breaking into a building because of his work before. *insider.com*, 13 Dec 2022.

CUDDLY COWS

After a widespread backlash on social media, the Indian government withdrew an appeal for citizens to replace Valentine's Day with "Cow Hug Day" to better reflect Hindu values, seeing Valentine's as a Western holiday that goes against tradition. The Animal Welfare Board had said that "hugging cows will bring emotional richness and increase individual and collective happiness," but political analyst Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay said it was "absolutely crazy, defying logic." *irishe Examiner.com*, 10 Feb 2023.



MARTIN ROSS

SPACE ODDITIES

All the news fit to print from our Solar System and way beyond



TOD / PROD.DB / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: Tatooine-like worlds orbiting a binary system may turn out to be one of the best places to search for habitable planets.

ALIEN ANSWER

Researchers from the University of California believe it is possible that we could get an alien response to signals from Earth as early as 2029. While signals deliberately sent from Earth to other planets, such as the 1974 Arecibo signal, are still only a fraction of their way to their intended destination, since 1972 NASA has been using a system of radio antennae called the Deep Space Network (DSN) to track their spacecraft and send them powerful radio signals. These include the probes Voyager One and Two, Pioneer 10 and 11 and New Horizons. Researchers Howard Isaacson and Reilly Derrick mapped out the paths of these craft, then worked out which stars could have received radio signals sent to the probes by the DSN. They then calculated when we might feasibly receive a response from any civilisations around the stars that could have detected the signals. The researchers found that the DSN signals could have already reached four stars, the closest of which could have sent a response that would reach Earth by 2029. Two more systems reached by the signals could respond by 2031 and 2033. Isaacson and Derrick say

We could get an alien response to signals from Earth by 2029

they have no evidence that the stars have planets around them or whether, if they do, they are remotely habitable; but they did the work to highlight potentially how quickly aliens could detect us and make contact given the right conditions. *New Scientist*, 6 May 2023.

TATOOINE LIVES

While Luke Skywalker's *Star Wars* home planet Tatooine famously has two suns, indicating that it is orbiting a binary system, astronomers have doubted that it is actually possible for a planet to have a stable, habitable orbit in a binary star system. Now, though, a series of computer simulations have suggested that Tatooine-like planets in orbit around pairs of stars might be one of the best places to search for habitable planets beyond our Solar System. Researchers ran simulations of 4,000 configurations of binary stars with an Earth-like planet in

orbit around them and tracked their orbits for up to a billion years to see if they would settle into locations where life had the time to potentially emerge. They found that about one in eight of the planets became unstable and was kicked out of the systems, but the rest settled into a stable orbit around the stars, and one in 10 ended up in a zone where life was potentially able to develop. Of the 4,000 planets that the team simulated, roughly 500 maintained stable orbits that kept them in their habitable zones at least 80 per cent of the time. Commenting on the simulations, astrophysicist Jason Wright from Penn State University said: "This is an under-explored population of planets. There's no reason we can't go after them, and studies like this are presumably showing us that it's worthwhile to try." *sciencenews.org*, 24 Jan 2023.

PLANET NINE FROM OUTER SPACE

There has been a persistent belief that a ninth planet exists in our Solar System, yet to be found by astronomers. Now, researchers believe that the new generation of high-definition telescopes like the James Webb Space



Telescope make its discovery a real possibility. The planet, if it exists, is thought to be at least five times the size of Earth, and possibly much larger, and to be located in the far outer reaches of the Solar System, up to 20 times further from the Sun than Neptune, with an orbital period of 10,000 or 20,000 years. Sara Webb of Swinburne University in Australia said of the proposed ninth planet: "The Solar System as we know it doesn't really make sense without it. When we look at really distant objects, such as dwarf planets beyond Pluto, we find their orbits are a little unexpected. They move on very large elliptical (oval-shaped) orbits, are grouped together, and exist on an incline compared to the rest of the Solar System." She explains that "when astronomers use a computer to model what gravitational forces are needed for these objects to move like this, they find that a planet at least 10 times the mass of Earth would have been required to cause this." Because the planet is so far out, it will be very poorly lit by the Sun, so extremely difficult to locate, even with the most sensitive instruments. Some astronomers think that instead of a planet, there is a huge disc of icy objects, but discoveries around other stars give some researchers confidence that there is a planet to be found. Professor Konstantin Batygin of the California Institute of Technology says that "Planet Nine is likely to be very reminiscent of a typical extrasolar super-Earth." *yahoo.com*, 20 Feb 2023.

GREEN COMET

In late January and early February, the Earth was passed by an unusual green comet that had not been seen in our skies since Neanderthals were alive. The comet, discovered last March and named comet C/2022 E3 (ZTF), has an orbital period of at least 50,000 years, travelling in from the Oort cloud at the very edge of the Solar System and round the Sun before heading back out again, passing close to Earth at a distance of 2.5 light minutes (27 million miles). It



TOP: Comet C/2022 E3 (ZTF). ABOVE: An artist's impression of Planet Nine.

is believed to be emitting a green glow because its head contains diatomic carbon, pairs of carbon molecules bound together, which produces a green light when excited by the Sun's ultraviolet radiation. *theguardian.com*, 23 Jan 2023.

A FALL OF MOONDUST

Scientists from the University of Utah have come up with a radical proposal to slow climate change on Earth, suggesting that "ballistically eject[ing] millions of pounds of lunar dust around Earth could help deflect the Sun's rays and cool down the planet." Their idea is to mine dust from the Moon and use it to shield the Earth from the Sun, reducing the amount of solar radiation the planet receives by one or two per cent. Astronomy professor Ben Bromley, lead author of the study, said: "If we took a small amount of material and put it on a special orbit between the Earth and the Sun and

broke it up, we could block out a lot of sunlight with a little amount of mass." He suggests using "electromagnetic mass drivers" based on the Moon to continuously fire dust mined there at one of the Lagrange Points where gravity is stable, allowing it to form a sunshield. He proposes using the Moon as it has plenty of material that could be mined for this purpose and because its lower gravity makes it easier to launch the dust, with the main cost being getting the equipment to do this to the Moon in the first place. The proposal has had a mixed reception, with many scientists pointing out that it would be better to concentrate cost and effort on directly reducing the amount of carbon in the atmosphere rather than geoengineering the Moon to cut solar radiation, as this would need to be done continuously to keep the Earth within safe temperatures. *popularmechanics.com*, 10 Feb 2023.

SIDELINES...

FUNKY MONKEY

Social media influencer Funky Matas spent two hours training a pet monkey to use a tattoo needle gun, then turned it loose to give him a permanent design on his knee, watched by a livestreamed audience. The monkey refused to perform until bribed with snacks, but then enthusiastically scribbled a mark across most of Matas's knee, adding to the 200 tattoos he already has. "While the tattoo itself wasn't the best in terms of quality, the event was a fascinating look into the capabilities of these highly intelligent animals," said Matas. *dailymail.co.uk*, 7 Feb 2023.

BOXING CLEVER

An animal shelter in Hamilton, Ohio, came up with a unique Valentine fundraiser, offering people the chance to name a cat litter box after a former romantic partner, saying, "For a \$5 donation we will write your ex's name in a litter box and give it to the cats, to let them do what they do best!" They also posted the names of the unfortunate nominees on their Facebook page on Valentine's Day. *UPI.com*, 2 Feb 2023.

CRÈME CRIME

Joby Pool, 32, broke into an industrial unit in Telford, Shropshire, with an angle grinder and used a stolen lorry with false plates to make off with a trailer containing 200,000 Creme Eggs worth £31,000. He then headed for the M42 motorway, where West Mercia police caught up with him, later saying that they had been hunting someone "presumably purporting to be the Easter bunny" and had "saved Easter". *BBC News*, 14 Feb 2023.

SHEEPISH

In an attempt to break out of the Chonchocoro maximum security prison in Bolivia, where he was serving a 15-year sentence for murder, José Luis Callisaya Diaz disguised himself as a sheep. Wrapping himself in a sheepskin coat, he tried to dodge security and crawl through the grassland around the jail on all fours to break through one of the external walls under the cover of bad weather. Prison officers, however, noticed he was absent from his cell, spotted him creeping through the pasture and quickly rounded him up. *news.com.au*, 16 Feb 2023.



SIDELINES...

FUTURE DAYS

TikTok user Eno Alaric, who claims to be a time traveller from 2714, insisted on 22 March that “a very hostile alien species is coming to take back Earth, we will not win” and that “another alien, whose world was destroyed by the hostiles, will save some of us. On March 23, 2023, about 8,000 people will be taken to another habitable planet.” As far as can be discerned, this hasn’t happened. He also claims that the James Webb Space Telescope will find a massive Sun-eating alien later this year and that 350 million people will be infected by a virus from melting Arctic ice next year. *mirror.co.uk*, 22 Mar 2023.

FLORIDA MAN

Chad Mason, 36, of Clearwater, Florida, was spotted by neighbours having sex with a friend’s Golden-doodle dog outside the apartment complex where he lived. After being confronted, he fled the scene and broke into the nearby Northwood Presbyterian Church where he wrecked the nativity scene and smashed several potted plants, then destroyed a nearby mailbox and attempted to steal a car, at which point police caught up with him and arrested him for lewd exhibition, indecent exposure, and criminal mischief. *dailymail.com*, 6 Dec 2022.

MIGHTY MOUSE

A Pacific pocket mouse named Pat, after *Star Trek* star Sir Patrick Stewart, has been recognised by Guinness World Records as the world’s oldest living mouse in human care. The mouse is part of a captive breeding programme at San Diego Zoo in California and was nine years and 209 days old when awarded the title. *breaking-news.ie*, 9 Feb 2023.



BUNS AWAY!

Why Abingdon’s Coronation celebrations involved bunging bread from the rooftops



PHOTOS: USA GLEDHILL

ABOVE: The day after King Charles III was crowned, buns were chucked from the roof of Abingdon’s old County Hall in a quirky Oxfordshire tradition that has marked major events since the coronation of George III in 1761.

On 7 May the people of Abingdon in Oxfordshire celebrated the Coronation by throwing 5,000 buns from the roof of the old County Hall. The town has been marking major events this way since the coronation of George III in 1761. It started as a (slightly

haphazard) way of giving food to the poor and is now a unique established tradition.

The freshly-baked currant buns are thrown by members of the town council (sometimes with a bit of help from the local cricket club) while thousands of people cram into

the market square and try to catch the treats before they hit the ground. Some of the buns are eaten by those who catch them, but others are kept as treasured souvenirs. You can see a collection of buns from some of the 36 previous throws in the County Hall Museum.



Red Matter

DAVID HAMBLING asks if room-temperature superconductivity could at last be a real possibility

Superconductivity is unusual in science: an unexplained phenomenon which is easily repeatable and well documented. It is also commercially important. But because nobody knows exactly how it works, breakthroughs are approached with caution. The latest development in superconductivity may be a great leap forward, or just a big red herring.

The history of this field goes back to 1911 when Dutch physicist Heike Kamerlingh Onnes was exploring the resistance of metallic mercury at extremely low temperatures. When he reduced the temperature to around four degrees above absolute zero, electrical resistance suddenly dropped so low that his instruments could not detect any at all. This was unexpected and unprecedented. Everything has some resistance, and his finding made no sense. Onnes found the same effect with gold and platinum, and also discovered that once induced, an electric current just kept flowing round the circuit indefinitely.

Onnes coined the term 'superconductivity' to describe the effect, and won a Nobel Prize for his work. Subsequent researchers found more examples of superconductivity at extremely low temperatures, but the how and why remained elusive. In 1957 researchers theorised that under certain circumstances electrons form 'Cooper pairs' and flow without friction and this is the accepted explanation. However, the theory is little use in determining what materials will superconduct and at what temperature.

So-called 'high-temperature superconductors' were discovered in 1986. Unlike the simple metals used by Onnes and others, these are complex compounds like Bismuth strontium calcium copper oxide. The 'high temperature' is still almost 200 degrees below zero, but allows apparatus to be cooled with cheap liquid nitrogen rather than expensive liquid helium. This made it possible to build devices based on superconducting magnets such as medical MRI scanners for soft tissue imaging.

More widespread use of this technology will require room-temperature superconductors. Transmitting electricity over high-voltage lines always involves some loss to resistance heating – estimated at 200 million megawatt hours per year – which would be cut to zero by superconducting cables. Superconducting magnets would

The team jokingly named it 'Red Matter' after a substance in the Star Trek universe

enable high-speed magnetic levitating (maglev) trains with no track friction. It would revolutionise nuclear fusion reactor designs, which use magnetic fields to contain a high-temperature reaction and promise endless cheap electricity (see **FT428:16**). And the technology would produce a new generation of supercomputers and ultra-compact consumer electronics with greatly extended battery life.

Records for superconductor temperature have crept upwards a few degrees per decade with the discovery and testing of new materials. But a new breakthrough announced by Ranga Dias and colleagues at the University of Rochester in New York pushes superconductivity into the room temperature range. The catch is that the material only exists at extreme pressure – 1 gigapascal, a pressure greater than the deepest ocean on Earth – but the dramatic temperature improvement makes it highly significant. Dias's team mixed hydrogen and nitrogen gases and reacted them with the rare-earth metal lutetium at about 200°C for two days to produce a substance known as nitrogen-doped lutetium hydride. This was compressed in a piece of equipment known as a diamond anvil. During the compression process, the blue material took on a striking red colour. The team jokingly nicknamed it 'red matter', after a fictional substance in the Star Trek universe. And, according to their measurements, the new material has zero resistance at an unprecedentedly high temperature. "With this material, the dawn of ambient superconductivity and applied technologies has arrived," according to a statement from Dias's team.

There are already doubts about whether, after a century of waiting, we finally have the holy grail of superconductivity. The breakthrough needs to be replicated at other laboratories before it can be accepted. In general, superconductivity is down to the crystal lattice structure of the material involved, and there is little indication of the actual form of Red Matter,



BELOW: An approximately one-millimetre diameter sample of lutetium hydride, a superconducting material created in the lab of scientist Ranga Dias.

which may be a mix of several different crystal forms. "There's still a lot to be done in terms of understanding the exact structure of this material, which is very crucial to understanding how this material is superconducting," Dias admits. "We're hoping if we can make it in larger quantities we'll get a better understanding of the material structure."

Other researchers are sceptical due to research from the team published in the prestigious journal *Nature* in 2020. This also claimed room-temperature superconductivity, but was later retracted. Critics questioned the accuracy of data in this paper and how the published data were derived from the experimental measurements. While not saying that there was actual cheating, critics implied that the data did not support the claims.

In theory, because superconducting Red Matter can be created relatively easily, it should not take long for other researchers to reproduce the University of Rochester results. However, early attempts are not encouraging; Chinese researchers at the University of Nanjing failed to detect any superconductivity in the material. However Dias noted that their sample had not turned red, suggesting it had not gone through the transformation under pressure into superconducting form. "We find it difficult to assume this group accurately recreated our material," Dias told *New Scientist* magazine.

This type of argument quickly degenerates into accusations that one side is not following the same experimental protocol, or that the other did not get the results they claimed. One failed replication is not conclusive, but it is not a good start. Dias remains bullish and ready to take on anyone questioning his claims. "Any group working to replicate our results should expect to be challenged, and multiple failed experiments are also likely, if our experience is any guide," says Dias.

Dias may be keen to get his claims in now because as new AI technology may rapidly unearth further candidate materials for room-temperature superconductivity. As always in science, being published first is what matters. We still do not know whether room temperature, room pressure superconductivity is even possible. But we might soon.

PAUL DEVEREUX celebrates his 100th FT column with a double-sized digest of the latest discoveries



A DROWNED STONE-AGE ROAD

Deep beneath the waves off the coast of Croatia's Korčula Island, archaeologist divers from the University of Zadar have made a surprising discovery – a c.7000-year-old road paved with irregular stone slabs. The mystery is, of course, what it is doing at the bottom of the Adriatic Sea. Stone-Age tools and other artefacts scattered around it clearly mark it as Neolithic. Around 7,000 years ago, the Hvar people settled on the islands and coasts of the northeast Adriatic Sea, and in 2021 a submerged site, 'Soline', presumed to have belonged to the Hvar, was found not too far away from the road's position. Archaeologists therefore reasonably assume the road originally once linked to Soline, and further speculate that it likely "was the remnant of a road system linking other possible Stone Age settlements".

The reason the Neolithic road is submerged simply underlines the fact that at various times and for various reasons over the ages, the level of the Adriatic Sea has risen, and ever so gradually continues to do so. *BBC Newsround, 12 May 2023.*

BACK TO THE DAWN OF LIFE

Llandrindod in Mid-Wales is a quiet unassuming place – your columnist knew it well during his time living in Wales. But now, suddenly, it has taken on exceptional importance in the archaeological world due to the discovery of very rare fossils of invertebrates that go back to the dawn of evolution.

The fossil site is a small quarry discovered near their Llandrindod home by Drs Lucy Muir and Joseph Botting of Museum Wales in Cardiff, both with degrees in palaeontology. They knew of the site for about a decade, and that it possesses fossils, but it was only during the pandemic they had the time to examine it in detail. They found that it



The careful presentation and prominent positioning indicate these hands were in effect 'trophies'

contains a plethora of fossils of tiny marine organisms from when Wales was covered by an ocean. They date to c.460-470 million years ago, during the 'Cambrian Explosion', when complex life started to stir.

Most of the fossils (170 have so far been identified) are only 5mm or less in length, and the discoverers had to crowdfund in order to obtain high-powered microscopes allowing them to properly study them. It is exceedingly rare to get fossils of complex organisms, creatures without internal skeletal structures, which makes this site so rare and important, along with its age, and many of the ones at the Llandrindod site have preserved soft tissues such as

ABOVE LEFT: Archaeologist divers studying the Stone Age road beneath the Adriatic Sea. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Dr Joseph Botting and Dr Lucy Muir in the Museum Wales fossil store with the new fossils and a life-size model of one of their discoveries. **LEFT:** Some of the severed right hands at Tell el-Dab'a, Egypt.

digestive systems, eyes, and brains. The fossils include those of worms, starfish, sponges and crustaceans, among others. Researchers at Uppsala University in Sweden have also been called in to dissolve some of the rock in hydrofluoric acid, and have extracted minute fragments that show cellular-level detail.

Botting states that they are only at the beginning of the research at the site. "Every time we go back, we find something new, and sometimes it's something truly extraordinary," he says. "There are a lot of unanswered questions, and this site is going to keep producing new discoveries for decades." *Guardian, 1 May 2023.* (Original paper in *Nature Ecology and Evolution* 7, 1 May).

HANDY PITS

Archaeologists excavating three pits in the forecourt of an ancient Egyptian palace in 2011 got a grisly surprise – carefully severed right hands of at least 12 people, one of them probably female. The hands had splayed fingers and were "still flexible", so they had to have been buried just before the onset of rigor mortis or shortly after it had passed. The palace the pits were found in was Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris, belonging to the Hyksos people, and one of the hands had been placed in front of the Throne Room. (The Hyksos were a Semitic people who invaded – some say immigrated into – the Nile Delta in 1638 BC and ruled northern Egypt until the Egyptians forced them out around 1530 BC.)

German and Austrian researchers, who have recently made the first analysis of the hands, think that while the severing of hands could have taken place as a punishment, the careful presentation and prominent positioning indicate these hands were in effect ‘trophies’. *Science Alert*, 5 April 2023. (Original paper in *Scientific Reports* 13, 31 Mar. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-32165-8>)

PSYCHEDELIC HAIR

Hard, scientific evidence of Bronze Age psychoactive drug-taking has been found by archaeologists in hair strands from the cave of Es Càrritx in Menorca. It has been known for a long time that people took hallucinogens thousands of years ago in the Americas and Asia, and has been inferred at prehistoric sites and with artefact finds in Europe, but this Menorcan research claims to be the first direct evidence of the actual ingestion of plant-based mind-altering substances by prehistoric Europeans. “We are presenting the earliest evidence of drug consumption in European prehistory,” affirms lead investigator Elisa Guerra-Doce, an associate professor of prehistory at the University of Valladolid in Spain.

Es Càrritx contains seven chambers and has been known since its discovery in 1995 to have been used as a Bronze Age funerary site: around 200 people – all ages, male and female – were deposited there between about 1400 BC and 800 BC. Some of those bodies were specially treated: their hair was tinted red, combed, cut and strands of it sealed inside tubes made of antler or wood. Ten of these tubes were hidden away in another, separate chamber along with funerary objects. The red-tinted locks of hair contained within the tubes measured up to about 5 in (13cm) in length. The investigators conducted a forensic chemical analysis of the hairs and found they contained compounds of the Menorcan native plants white henbane (*Hyoscyamus albus*), mandrake

(*Mandragora autumnalis*), devil’s snare (*Datura stramonium*), and joint pine (*Ephedra fragilis*). All these are well-known, and even traditional, mind-altering compounds. The hair samples had been lodged in a sealed chamber of the cave until c.800 BC, so these results are unlikely to have been subjected to any recent contaminant.

The researchers also detected atropine and scopolamine, both strong psychoactive substances found in plants in the genera *Datura* and *Brugmansia* (the nightshade family) and which were widely used ritually in pre-Columbian South America and even in mediæval witchcraft in Europe.

Not only do these findings provide firm proof of the ingestion of mind-altering substances in European prehistory, but they provide a potential glimpse into the social milieu in which they were ritually used in Menorca and by extension into other parts of Europe. Those with ‘psychedelic hair’ were the small minority of the dead found in Es Càrritx, which might suggest they were religious specialists: “We suggest that maybe there were certain people... who controlled their use of these drugs,” Guerra-Doce says. “All this evidence made it seem that... certain individuals deserved this hair treatment, and those individuals were the ones who consumed the drugs.” The ones with special status. The ones we



call ‘shamans’. *CNN*, 10 April 2023. (Original paper in *Scientific Reports* 13, 6 April. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-31064-2>)

HELPFUL TOOTH DECAY

Archaeologists come in all kinds of specialisms these days. Christine Warinner, for instance, is a biomolecular archaeologist who has developed new methods to analyse prehistoric human dental plaque that has hardened into dental calculus – or tartar to you and me. “Dental calculus is the only part of your body that routinely fossilises while you’re still alive,” she informs us. It also contains the highest concentrations of DNA in ancient skeletons. In a new study, Warinner and her colleagues have analysed tartar from 12 Neanderthals, 34 archaeological humans, and 18 contemporary humans, covering, in all, a length of time from 100,000 years ago to the present in Europe and Africa. The researchers sequenced ten billion DNA fragments and reassembled them into 459 bacterial genomes, about three-quarters of which related to known oral bacteria, but the researchers also encountered two species from a genus of bacteria called *Chlorobium* found in the prehistoric subjects in the study, but not found in modern humans. They do not precisely match any known species today, but are akin to bacteria occurring in water sources found in cave environments. The short of this is, such research opens up possible avenues for finding strange ancient bacteria from which we may be able to derive new antibiotics. “Bacteria are the source of virtually all our antibiotics – we really haven’t discovered any new major classes of antibiotics in the past couple years, and we’re running out,” Warinner points out. Quite an urgent case, then, for back to the past, so a good job we have biomolecular archaeologists. *Live Science*, May 2023. (Original paper in *Science* 4 May 2023, vol.380, issue 6645. DOI: 10.1126/science.adf5300)



ABOVE LEFT: Es Càrritx, the multi-chambered cave and Bronze Age funerary site in Menorca. ABOVE RIGHT: Locks of hair were tinted red, and strands were combed, cut and then sealed inside tubes. TOP: A wooden bowl and spoon, some of the items connected to drug ritual found accompanying the locks of hair.



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

285: I, CLAUDIUS vs THE CROWN



ABOVE: "Tomyris Plunges the Head of the Dead Cyrus Into a Vessel of Blood" in a painting by Rubens,

The Title merely implies the mixtures of fact and fiction that characterise so many biographies, ancient and modern, in whatever medium.

I do not intend to read about Harry going *Spare*. Nor shall I open the companion ravings threatened by his Missus.

I am simply taking a cue to compare and contrast some ancient princes: Cyrus 'The Great', founder of the Persian Empire, and Germanicus, most glittering young Roman royal of the Julio-Claudia dynasty – Augustus to Nero. Two primary sources for the first: Herodotus's Book One and the *Cyropædia* of Xenophon.

At first blush, a Greek writing the biography of a non-Greek comes as a surprise. If biography it is. Many see the work more as an historical novel. If so, it would predate by some centuries what are commonly regarded as the earliest Græco-Roman ventures in this genre.

However, it should be remembered that Xenophon had intense personal experience of Persia and its ways. As a

Queen Tomyris had Cyrus's head severed and plunged into an animal hide filled with human blood...

mercenary soldier, he had fought there on the wrong side of a civil war, and famously led his surviving troops home to Greece, sampling (in detailed description) the local beers, not your Greek's average tippie, an adventure told in his *Anabasis* ('March Up-Country'), model for the 1979 Hollywood film *The Warriors*.

His *Cyropædia* was long a very influential book in Europe. For easy instance, Machiavelli devoted much attention to it. I am arguing elsewhere that it was a probable model for Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*.

There is a complete online translation

of it in the Project Gutenberg series, and in print that of the Loeb Classical Library series.

Book One (of Eight) details the education, military and otherwise, of the young Cyrus. The rest cover his military successes down to his death, of which more later.

Up to the age of 16 or so, young Persians underwent a Spartan-like physical and moral education. This is manifest in large ways and small, the latter for instance evident in their diet: bread, cress 'for relish', and cold water to drink.

Not, I fancy, to Harry's taste, nor Charles's, remembering the latter's dislike of his Spartan-like Gordonstoun School – one can understand his then-tabloid-fodder quaffing cherry brandy in a local Stornoway pub.

There are many titbits of Persiana in this opening book. For example, their distaste for public spitting, nose-wiping, and farting – I sympathise with two of these objections.

After 'graduation', Cyrus and his young

peers were obliged to spend the next 10 years sleeping outside public buildings to guard them. Might we envisage a young Harry keeping a nocturnal eye on The Shard?

Herodotus offers a different and far more lurid picture of young Cyrus's arrival in this world. King Astyages dreamed that his daughter Mandane urinated so much that she swamped the whole of Asia. In a second vision, a tree grew from genitals so big that it overshadowed that continent.

Understandably (perhaps he was eating too much cheese before bedtime, a habit that is often said to cause nightmares) alarmed by these apparitions, he consulted the Magi who interpreted them as dire warnings of the birth of a putative usurper.

Hence, when Cyrus was born, Astyages handed the baby over to his kinsman-steward Harpagus with instructions to dispose of it and bury the corpse in secret.

Harpagus balked at committing this infanticide and handed the child over to be reared by a remote peasant farmer and his wife Kyno (Bitch). There are some obvious parallels here with the exposures of (e.g.) Oedipus and Romulus/Remus.

When Astyages found out the deceit, he took a sadistic revenge on Harpagus, killing and dismembering his son and serving him up for dinner. Shades of the more famous Greek story of The Banquet of Thyestes, *Titus Andronicus*, and Peter Greenaway's notorious film *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife & Her Lover*.

Herodotus gives what he calls the most likely of the many versions. He has Cyrus defeated and killed in battle against the nomadic tribe of the Massagetæ, led by Queen Tomyris, a redoubtable lady who had his head severed and plunged into an animal hide filled with human blood, saying "I fulfil my threat; you have your fill of human blood."

Harry is unlikely to meet such a sanguinary fate. No decapitation for him. But, in the eyes of many, he has been (figuratively, we hope) emasculated by Meghan, so...

Time to put in a good word. INVICTUS, of course. The Latinate title is appropriate. There are classical antecedents of sorts. The emperor Domitian would pit dwarfs against each other in the arena. Tasteless by modern standards, arguably less so than the 'sport' of dwarf-throwing, apparently originating in Australia and popular in several other countries. Philostratus (*Gymnastikos*, ch41) tells of an Egyptian wrestler called Mys who became a champion, despite disease and several bodily deformities. For more on this, see the website entitled 'Disabled Athletes in the Ancient World?'

Germanicus's (15 BC-AD 19) name was an honorific inherited from his father in honour of his military victories; originally called something like Nero Claudius Drusus (exact nomenclature disputed). Adopted as son and heir by Tiberius. Married Agrippina the Elder, thus now firmly established in the imperial family.



LEFT: A detail from Nicolas Poussin's "The Death of Germanicus".

One of their nine children (most died young) was the future emperor Caligula, who unfortunately survived.

Anthony Barrett, *Caligula* (1993, pp. 20. 27) harps on his extraordinary popularity with the Roman populace, which regarded him as their equivalent to Alexander the Great. This is somewhat exaggerated, but at least he cuts a more favourable image than Tiberius's son Drusus, who was so devoted to sanguinary gladiatorial combats that they adopted specially sharpened swords nicknamed 'Drusian'.

Germanicus had a sister, Livilla, said by Tacitus (*Annals*, bk4 ch3) to have blossomed from a child ugly duckling to dazzling beauty. In AD 31, she embarked on an affair with the all-powerful (until his sudden Beria-like liquidation by Tiberius) Sejanus. Together, they were accused of poisoning the Emperor's son Drusus, her husband. True or not (much debated), she paid dearly, being locked in a room by her mother and starved to death.

In AD 19, Germanicus went to Egypt to see its antiquities – his Wikipedia entry is here misleading. Tacitus (*Annals*, bk2 chs59-61) details his itinerary. I have read that Harry and Meghan sealed their love on a camping holiday in Botswana – I am not saying one holiday is better or worse than the other. Perhaps Germanicus had been reading Herodotus. Romans typically ridiculed the Pyramids as vain, useless objects, designed only to boost a Pharaoh's edifice complex. The most famous site visited was the 'Singing Statue' of Memnon (FT312:17), which was said to break into song when touched by dawn sunshine.

For more on this, see Benjamin Kelly's

article in *Classical Quarterly* 60 (2010), 221-37. Though not the first Roman dignitary to visit Egypt, Germanicus's pilgrimage put it firmly on the Roman tourist map, equivalent to the 18th-century English gentleman's 'Grand Tour' of Europe and the incomprehensible desire of Australians to flock to London and settle in Earl's Court, known as 'Kangaroo Alley'.

Germanicus died mysteriously this same year, an event which inspired a painting by Poussin and a nice little murder mystery for wannabe Falcos to solve. The common belief was that he had been poisoned by his arch-enemy Piso, governor of Syria, and wife Plancina, poison provided by a lethal Syrian pharmacist, Martina, all with the connivance of Tiberius, jealous of Germanicus's popularity – there was unparalleled mob mourning in Rome, though no piles of flowers and teddy bears.

Suspicions of foul play were exacerbated (Tacitus, *Annals*, bk2 ch69) by the discovery in Germanicus's bedroom of many disinterred human remains, incantations, a lead curse tablet inscribed with his name, ashes smeared with a mysterious putrid substance, and "other black magic instruments".

Piso and (later) Plancina were put on trial for murder. Both committed suicide: that implies What...? Some moderns think they were framed by Tiberius, something in keeping with his character, but unprovable – Scottish verdict only.

We trust Harry will not end up this way. He may here perhaps be best bidden Goodbye with the title of a David Lodge novel about National Servicemen – *GINGER, YOU'RE BARMY!*

POSTAL TIME-SLIPS

Another bulging postbag filled with tales of long-delayed letters and mysteriously misplaced missives

Posted 105 years ago, a letter with a Bath postmark and a 1d stamp featuring the head of George V arrived at Finlay Glen's flat on Hamlet Road, Crystal Palace in 2021. Glen opened the letter, which was addressed to Katie Marsh, appropriately enough the wife of prominent stamp dealer Oswald Marsh, and found that it was sent by Christabel Mennell, the daughter of wealthy local tea merchant Henry Tuke Mennell, a family friend. In the letter Mennell says she is "quite ashamed of myself after saying what I did," and that she had been feeling "miserable here with a very heavy cold." Local historian Stephen Oxford said, "Crystal Palace generated a huge influx of very wealthy people and so to find out about someone who moved to the area for possibly that very reason is absolutely fascinating." A Royal Mail spokesperson said: "We appreciate that people will be intrigued by the history of this letter from 1916, but we have no further information on what might have happened." Glen added, regarding the Marsh family: "It's an amazing piece of their family history that has turned up – if they want to, they can come round." *BBC News*, 16 Feb 2023.

Brattleboro, Vermont, post carrier Viv Woodland immediately noticed that there was something strange about the postcard she was given to deliver to Holland L Smith of 24 Oak Street, Brattleboro: firstly, she knew no one of that name lived at the delivery address, and secondly, the postcard, showing California orange groves, looked extremely old. On closer inspection she noticed it had two postmarks, the first from Pomona in 1921 and a second on the other side from "Sacramento CA, 20 Oct 22", with no indication of where it could have been for the intervening 101 years. "It may have travelled and made its way



LEFT: Vermont postal worker Viv Woodland found a card first postmarked in 1921 in her mailbag.

BELOW LEFT: Diane Browne, headmistress of Adcote School, with a card sent to a former pupil that took 66 years to reach its destination.

BOTTOM LEFT: Finlay Glen and the letter that took 105 years to make its way from Bath to Crystal Palace.



back to California somehow, such as through a relative's belongings, or it could have been hiding for 100 years under a piece of equipment in a postal facility," said Woodland. Rather than deliver the card, she decided to track down any surviving relatives of Mr Smith and found that all four of his children still lived in Vermont. She sent the card to his oldest child, Nancy, now 90, who was grateful for the memento of her father and able to fill Woodland in on the family history behind the postcard. "This happy ending is better than I could have imagined," Woodland said. *vtdigger.org*, 24 Nov 2022.

A slightly disappointing delayed delivery turned up at a nursing home in Hest Bank, Lancashire, in February, over 80 years after it was sent to the address, which was a private house at the time. The envelope, postmarked October 1942, had a return address on the back that showed it had been sent by a cadet named Tattersall, based in Florida in the US, but was damaged and empty. Nevertheless, nursing home manager Kevin Beattie said the empty letter was "a nice conversation starter for the residents." *Sun on Sunday*, 19 Feb 2023.

Staff at Adcote School for Girls, a boarding school in Shropshire, were surprised to receive a card sent to a pupil by her mother that had taken 66 years to arrive, having been posted in 1957. It had a modern postmark dated 21 April 2023, but a pre-decimal blue 1d stamp and a green 1.5d stamp. There was an older, blurred postmark that couldn't be read,

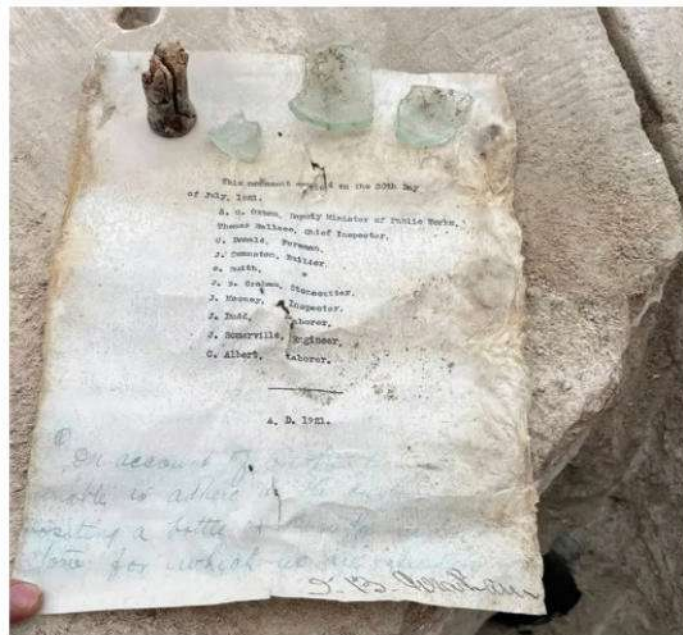




but circumstantial evidence suggested the 1957 postage date. It was addressed to Miss D Kerr and featured a picture of Penhelig Harbour, in the village of Aberdyfi in Gwynedd, Wales, with a message saying Kerr's father had been fishing while on a trip away and "had no luck".

Headmistress Diane Browne said that her "first reaction on seeing the postcard was complete disorientation," but she went on to search old school registers to see if she could identify the intended recipient. She found that a Denise Bronwen Kerr attended the school between 1957 and 1962 and was attempting to trace her to hand over the card. It is thought that Kerr would now be 78 and may have the married surname of Miles. "We would love to know who Miss D Kerr is and unite her with the postcard sent by her mum, all those years ago," Browne said. "If that postcard had been sent by my mum or dad, I would be thrilled to receive it, even after all this time." *BBC News, 12 May 2023.*

At the end of 2022 John Rainbow of Wylam in Northumberland received a letter that had taken 28 years to make its journey from Bridgwater in Somerset. It was franked on the front in Bridgwater in 1995 and on the back in Alnwick, Northumberland, again in 1995, then took almost 30 years to travel the final few miles south to Wylam, just outside Newcastle Upon Tyne. "It is in perfect condition. It's not like it's been lying around – it just looks old," Rainbow said. The letter was from Somerset farmer Patrick Daniel and appears to be a reply to a letter from Valerie Jarvis-Read, who owned Rainbow's house until 2010, enquiring whether they might be related, and recounts shared family history. Both Daniel and Jarvis-Read are now dead, and Daniel's son Richard said, "My father said he enjoyed hearing about her far-flung family and that he thought he'd better tell her about his – the tragedy is it never reached her." A Royal Mail spokesperson said: "Incidents like this happen very occasionally, and we are



uncertain what happened to cause this incident in this instance. We are very sorry for any inconvenience caused." *BBC News, 20 Jan 2023.*

A 101-year-old message in a bottle was found by workers moving a statue of Queen Victoria in Winnipeg, Canada, destroyed by protestors in 1921. The letter was dated 30 July 1921 and was an apology from the stonemason for not being able to place the traditional bottle of brandy under the statue due to prohibition being in force in Manitoba at the time. *<i>5 Dec 2022.*

A vast cache of undelivered mail that has languished semi-forgotten in British archives is now receiving attention from conservators and historians. What are known as the 'Prize Papers' consist of thousands of letters seized from enemy ships captured during various wars between 1650 and the early 19th century. While their cargoes were auctioned off, the mail they carried was retained as proof that their seizures were legitimate spoils of war. Badly sorted, haphazardly catalogued and grimy from centuries of neglect, this trove is now being conserved, catalogued and digitised by Britain's National Archives and a research team from the Carl von Ossietzky University in Germany. There are over 160,000 letters, plus other documents, from more than 35,000 ships, many of which remain unopened. Project director Dagmar Friest says she was "electrified" by some of the things they found. "The immense number of letters include those written by ordinary working men and women for whom we have virtually no letters surviving," she explained. Amanda Bevan, from the National Archives team, says: "We open each box and we're not sure what we are going to find." *New York Times International Edition, 16 Mar 2023.*

TOP & CENTRE: The prohibition era message left by a stonemason beneath the now toppled statue of Queen Victoria. **LEFT:** Some of the vast 'Prize Papers' cache of undelivered post.



Carolingian spectres

The coronation finds **ALAN MURDIE** reflecting on the debt of British ghostlore to Charles I and II



ABOVE: The beheading of Charles I outside the Banqueting Hall of Whitehall in 1649. **BELOW:** Charles I in an engraving after a portrait by Van Dyck.

Watching the coronation of King Charles III and Camilla on 6 May 2023 (see p4-5), I heard a BBC commentator hailing it the start of a “new Carolingian age”. Central in the ceremony and a direct connection with the last sovereign named Charles to be anointed and crowned was the jewel-studded St Edward’s Crown, used at every coronation ever since Charles II (1630-1685) in 1661. The previous royal crown worn by his father Charles I (1600-1649), said to date back to the time of Edward the Confessor, was melted down by the Commonwealth following the ending of the Civil War in 1649. At his execution on 30 January 1649 in Whitehall, Charles I memorably declared: “I go from a corruptible to incorruptible crown.”

Reflecting on all of this made me think of just how much the ghostlore of Great Britain owes to the reigns of Charles I and Charles II and the Stuart legacy, including their own occasional spectral returns.

“If any English king has a right to a ghost, it is surely Charles I,” wrote Philip W Sergeant in his *Historic British Ghosts*, contemplating that the Whitehall of 1938 was far too busy to be visited by him.

The idea of a ghostly Charles I was

“If any English king has a right to a ghost, it is surely Charles I,” wrote Philip W Sergeant



already present in the latter stages of the Civil War and during the Restoration in “numerous valedictory dialogues with ghosts of Charles I or Oliver Cromwell”, but as a symbol or conceit (see *The Haunted*, 2007, by Owen Davies). Curiously, though having lost crown, kingdom and head, Charles is not glimpsed at a great many other places either. He is not seen pacing battlefields, nor hovering at many of the locations where he was imprisoned during his detention prior to his execution.

Of those places claimed as sites of his return, the leading one is at Windsor Castle, where his decapitated body was taken. Here he walks the Royal Chapel and the Canon’s House within the castle precincts, “his appearance resembling a portrait by Van Dyck, his visitations being most common at Christmas time”, according to *Psychic News* (23 Dec 1961). He also returns headless at Maple Hall, Cheshire, the accuracy of this identification being open to question but for the claim his severed head also floats the corridors.

The classic story of the return of his severed head was offered by Sir Shane Leslie (1885-1971) in his strongly Catholic *Ghost Book* (1955) and concerned

Billingham Manor on the Isle of Wight, a place frequented by Leslie in the 1920s. After many ghostly goings-on, the finale occurred with a materialisation in 1928 when, after having been woken by noises in the night, members of the household traced manifestations to a sliding panel in the dining room (the house had smuggling connections and many secret stairways and rooms). Seeing a strange light emanating from the cupboard, they slid open the panel, whereupon everyone in the room saw the apparition of the separated head of King Charles I resting inside!

"No one could mistake the soft ringlets, the pointed beard and the pitiful expression on the face. Gradually as they watched the spectre faded back into the niche and the faint glow subsided with it." The king's head was said to habitually manifest on the eve of an execution occurring on the Island. Sir Shane supposedly checked and found the vision coincided with the hanging of a convicted murderer at the local prison.

Perhaps some Island criminologist can confirm or refute this; my own preliminary enquiries turning up no execution either on the Island or at Winchester Prison in Hampshire, over on the mainland. In June 2022, Jamie Forbes, a former resident of Billingham Manor, shared with the *Isle of Wight Echo* that shortly prior to his family moving out after 23 years in 1978, "in the last few weeks... we became aware of many strange goings-on. Some were very strange indeed". However, "The story concerning the head of Charles 1st was one we always discounted." (see www.islandecho.co.uk/famous-island-manor-goes-on-the-market-for-3-95million/, 3 June 2022).

Bedrooms in old stately homes and manors where Charles I supposedly once slept may also be haunted by him. At Painswick Manor in the Cotswolds, where he stayed during the 1643 Siege of Gloucester, you can still sleep in the same room and may see his shade (see Jack Hallam, *The Ghosts Who's Who*, 1977). At Cotehele at Calstock in East Cornwall, the room in which Charles slept possesses a 'cloying' atmosphere so intense that some people refuse to enter. The king supposedly slept there in 1644. According to *Ghosts: Mysterious Tales from the National Trust* (2008) by Sian Evans, a psychic detected the presence of "a young man in a ruff in the room", but this hardly fits Charles. At Pencait or Penkeat Castle in Lothian, Scotland, well documented manifestations commenced in the early 20th century after "a four-poster bedstead... once occupied by the king and [which] bears a reproduction of his death-mask, was moved in." The ghost sounded "exactly like a man groping and stumbling in the dark; and it has been suggested that, maybe it is



TOP AND ABOVE: Billingham Manor on the Isle of Wight and Ham House, Richmond, are reputed haunts of Charles I. LEFT: King Charles II.

searching for its lost head." On successive nights the bedclothes were found in a state of disorder, the mattress showing a depression like a reclining body might leave. (See 'Strange Happenings at Penkaet' Alasdair Alpin MacGregor, *Country Life*, 2 Dec 1954; *The Ghost Book*, 1955).

Naturally, this modest showing of ghostly appearances by Charles I are far exceeded by the legions of ghostly cavaliers and roundheads who once battled over his right to reign. One reason for the relative scarcity of royal appearances is the sense of martyrdom and air of sanctity posthumously attached to him by his most devout supporters, leading to a number of church



ABOVE: The Salcey Forest Oak, from Joseph George Strutt's *Sylva Britannica* (1822/1830). BELOW: The Theatre Royal Drury Lane.

and chapel dedications in his memory. As a near-saint for some, the expectation was that Charles rested in Heaven and did not return to Earth.

His restored heir Charles II as 'the Merry Monarch' might similarly have been expected to leave relatively few spectral traces, since happy characters generate fewer apparitions in tradition. However, his narrow escape from Parliamentary forces and years of exile were traumatic, as were the early years of his reign (London suffering the Great Plague in 1665, and the Great Fire in 1666 together with plots – real and imagined – to usurp him).

Prior to his restoration, the marvellous Ham House in Richmond on Thames was a meeting place of a secret society of faithful followers, known as the Sealed Knot, which supported him in exile. On his restoration to the throne, he awarded the owner of the house, the Duchess of Lauderdale, an annual pension for her loyalty. There have been reports of the ghost of Charles being sighted in the gardens and his pipe tobacco smelt in the hall.

Charles II also reputedly manifests at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane (he was a

Charles II manifests at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane with Grimaldi and several other wraiths



great lover of the stage) joining the Man in Grey, the 18th century clown Jacob Grimaldi and several other wraiths. He also walks at Chavenage House, Tetbury in Gloucestershire (see *Walking in Haunted Gloucestershire*, 1994, by Florence Jackson and Gordon Ottewell, p.92). Many of his alleged hauntings overlap with sites frequented by his 'mighty pretty' mistress' Nell Gwyn, her notoriety ensured by her bare-breasted portrait painted by Simon Verelst dated c.1670, which created a sensation that still has not subsided. By mid-Victorian times people were claiming "the portrait of any beauty of that period as hers" and numerous locations report her shade (see "A Note on Nell Gwyn" by John Adlard *Folklore*, vol.83, no.1, Spring, 1972, pp.61-67). Charles II might also be expected at Lauderdale House in Highgate, London, where two of his illegitimate sons were born; in 2015, warden Peter Gallagher claimed rescue from an evil spirit by the shade of Nell in 1997. His breathless story certainly made for a good headline grabber at the time the house was appealing for funds (*Ham and High Gazette*, 19 Mar 2015).

The legend-making process has been at work even with open-air sites. At Salcey Forest in Northamptonshire it has asserted lately that Nell and his spectral majesty may be glimpsed walking together, seeking a private spot to meet. This seems a garbled version of a story originally collected in the early 1970s by Joan Forman, herself an authority on royal ghosts (see *Haunted Royal Homes*, 1987) detailed in her earlier *Haunted East Anglia* (1974). She stated the forest was traditionally haunted by a love rival of Charles II for the favours of Nell, with the result the monarch arranged his assassination. The ghost of this murdered suitor was reputedly seen hurrying through the forest, “on what desperate errand none can guess”. Forman was sceptical, commenting the story smacked of historical fiction: “Would Charles have had a sexual rival murdered? It would have been an uncharacteristic activity for him, since he was one of the few Stuarts with a sense of humour. Much more likely he would have laughed the matter off or found some amusing way to humiliate his rival.”

I agree. Joan Forman also picked up a vague story of the King’s ghost roaming the house at Salcey Lawn, “but extensive renovation seems to have removed the haunting” (see also *Paranormal Northamptonshire*, 2019, by Andrew Poulton Smith; *Northamptonshire Telegraph*, 25+30 Oct 2019). Also recently, in October 2018, the former *Loose Women* star Andrea McLean recalled seeing a ghost looking like King Charles II pop into her living room after she was practising yoga.

Speaking at Disney’s ‘100 Years of Wonder’ celebration, she told the *Evening Standard*: “He was a man dressed like King Charles II and I was in my living room with my eyes shut. I’d just done some yoga and I could feel a presence and I opened my eyes and there was a man standing there dressed like that.” (*Evening Standard*, 28 Oct 2018).

Connected with the death of Charles II is a prophetic re-enactment of the final summoning of his doctor, who took a carriage to attend the deathbed of the king. The sound of the clinking harnesses of four horses pulling the ghostly coach are perceived around Black Horse Yard in Windsor as it rattles off towards the Castle, heard whenever a sovereign is about to die, though nothing seems to have reported before the death of Queen Elizabeth II last September.

Clashes over the legitimate succession to Charles II and the battle for the Crown following his death and the deposing of his brother James II in the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89 all further boosted the spectral population. The crushing of the Monmouth Rebellion in the West Country, the establishment of William and Mary as



Protestant monarchs in place of James II and the later defeat of the Jacobite risings in 1715 and 1745 all left ghostly echoes.

Thereafter, the struggle over which branch of the Stuart line should take the St Edward Crown mercifully ceased, coupled with a steady expansion of the Parliamentary system with the head of state fixed upon a hereditary succession principle. William and Mary began a tradition of royal domesticity as opposed to living in castles (Forman, J, 1987 op. cit) and the resultant constitutional settlement has meant – with the exception of the 20th century troubles in Ireland – Britain enjoying, in world terms, a remarkable degree of domestic tranquillity on its own soil ever since. This prolonged period of internal peace has, I would suggest, played a significant part in Britain achieving its ‘most haunted’ nation status, its stability allowing an accumulation of relics and encouraging a reverence for the past.

In his book, *The English Ghost: Spectres Through Time* (2011) Peter Ackroyd proclaims more ghost stories survive in England than anywhere else in the world. Similar views were expressed by ghost hunters Peter Underwood and Andrew Green during the 1970s, the latter quoting an estimate of 10,000 haunted sites (a suspiciously round number) drawn from a tourist organisation calculation in 1961.

An established church in the form of the Church of England with a network of 12,000 parish churches has maintained this phantom hegemony and respect for departed souls. As Simon Jenkins points out in *England’s Thousand Best Churches* (2000), the continuation means numerous plots of land in every town and village dedicated to remembering the dead. Packed, centuries-old graveyards are found in busy city centres, often to the surprise of many overseas visitors, and lie

LEFT: King Charles III. Given his various unconventional interests, ghosts should find his reign a sympathetic one.

largely unmolested; cultures that venerate ancestors understand this.

The lack of religious strife and the vagueness of the Anglican Church’s doctrine on the afterlife has further helped ghosts flourish in England, with them rising up in the gaps between dogmas and encouraged by religious doubt and uncertainty since the mid-19th century (see *Appearances of the Dead*, 1982, by RC Finucane).

Religious toleration has spread over into political life. Never having seen its aristocracy wiped out by a bloody revolution or its government fall to a coup d’état means that in Britain many impressive ancient domestic and civic buildings survive wholly intact. Thus, any 21st century list of haunted castles, palaces and stately homes is a close match for the one compiled by John Ingram in *The Haunted Homes and Family Traditions of Great Britain* in 1888.

The pain of past crimes and persecutions has faded from collective memory to the point they have been romanticised in literature and drama or even celebrated in comedy and musicals. Not routinely fearing the 3am knock on the door by the secret police and with the likelihood of sudden or violent death on the average Saturday afternoon probably greater at a football match than attending any political gathering has resulted in communities that populate their nights and winter months with phantom terrors and spectral bogeymen instead.

Villains great and small from the past are repackaged as myth. Henry VIII, Cromwell and Dick Turpin and their victims return as a source of entertainment, exploited by the heritage industry for the pleasure of tourists. Even some of the grisliest historic crimes, tortures or punishments are prone to be exhibited for thrills to horrified crowds at Madam Tussauds or the London Dungeon, or regaled on Jack the Ripper tours and the like. As Paul Barber pointed out in *Vampires, Burial and Death* (1988): “When the image has receded, the deceased is no longer dangerous, and the remains may be handled with the utmost casualness.” All of this, coupled with a rich literary culture, the survival of historic records and archives and a tolerance for eccentrics, means that stories of hauntings thrive and endure.

And as for the prospects for ghosts with King Charles III? Given his long-standing interest in alternative medicines, different religious traditions, parapsychology and conservation (see *The Prince and the Paranormal*, 1986, by John Dale) I think ghosts will do rather well.



KARL SHUKER investigates the latest crypto-creatures, real, fake and misidentified



FROM BIGFOOT TO BEAR FOOT

On 5 May 2023, a tree planter working at a camp near Alexis Creek in British Columbia (BC), Canada, discovered a sizeable, hairy, five-clawed mammalian paw. No other remains of its erstwhile owner were found, just the paw. Due to its striking appearance, this attracted considerable attention, especially when Joanna Finch from Cumberland, BC, posted several photographs of it on her Facebook page. Various suggestions were duly offered as to the identity of the creature. The three most commonly-voiced ones were a wolverine, a bear, or, more exotically, a bigfoot/sasquatch. The last-mentioned contender led to renowned bigfoot investigator Prof. Jeff Meldrum – formally Professor of Anthropology and Anatomy at Idaho State University – perusing the photos. He concluded that it was the left hind foot of a bear, and from the images that I have seen I totally agree with him. I have yet to learn of the paw's present whereabouts, and wonder if it has been preserved or merely discarded following its ursine exposure. On the rare occasions when physical evidence for a putative cryptid is procured, a DNA test would normally be recommended, but in this particular instance there seems little point in expending the time, facilities, or cost of doing so, as the appendage is so obviously from a bear. www.coasttocoastam.com/article/sasquatch-foot-found-in-canada/?fbclid=IwAR3hQVP-vdOo9KID-at7JD4GiOPat4QYxt26y1KFeB4hjsNmjOSJYYufPbc

SNEAKING UP ON THE SNAKE CAT

During early March 2023, I noticed a certain, very eye-catching photograph doing the rounds on social media and inciting all manner of speculation as



to the creature that it portrayed. As seen here, it is a close-up head-and-shoulders image of a very spectacular cat, ornately adorned in vivid black and yellow markings. According to claims accompanying this photo, the animal is a South American snake cat, up to 50cm (20in) long, weighing as much as 4kg (8.8lb), and allegedly the world's rarest species of wild cat, despite the claims also stating that it exists in a number of different countries, including Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Guyana, French Guiana, and Suriname. Yet within its ostensibly expansive distribution range, this exotic beast reputedly exists only in the most remote, inaccessible Amazon jungle locations, is poorly studied, and was not even photographed in the wild state until 2020. Yet the snake cat is supposedly well known to the indigenous locals, who sometimes even rear and tame cubs to keep their homes free of its venomous serpentine namesakes and other undesirable creatures. Looking at this single extraordinary photo – my subsequent investigations swiftly revealed that there were no other purported snake cat photos online – I had little doubt that it was a fake, as I had never encountered any information on this mysterious mammal and felt certain that such a visually arresting beast would be extensively (and scientifically) documented online and elsewhere if it were indeed real. Finally, courtesy of a Mexican article, I discovered the truth. As revealed in a *Chihuahua Noticias* news report, the snake cat is wholly fictitious, with its unique photo actually being an AI (Artificial Intelligence) creation. Looking again at its distinctive markings, I think it likely that photos of a large and very familiar, wide-ranging species of North American amphibian known as the tiger



FAR LEFT: The five-clawed mammalian paw found in British Columbia – despite appearances, it's more likely to belong to a bear than a bigfoot.

LEFT: The colourful, but wholly fictitious, snake cat. **ABOVE:** Video footage of an equally striking, but completely genuine, piebald black bear.

salamander *Ambystoma tigrinum*, whose bright yellow and black markings readily recall the snake cat's, may have played a part in this entity's photographic generation. <https://chihuahuanoticias.mx/la-leyenda-del-serpens-cattus-el-felino-mas-raro-de-la-tierra/>

BLACK AND WHITE BUT BEAR ALL OVER!

In contrast (in every sense too!), an equally eye-catching mammal reported recently is not only unexpected but also totally genuine. On 5 May 2023, *Outdoor Life* included online some remarkable and potentially unprecedented video footage of a piebald specimen of American black bear *Ursus americanus*, lately recorded in southwest Washington State. Previously shared on TikTok and Facebook, the video's accompanying details state that it was filmed on the Shoalwater Bay Reservation near Tokeland, and shows very clearly the bear walking sedately from right to left across the screen, just in front of an expanse of trees. Needless to say, its visual appearance has engendered all manner of giant panda comparisons (and jokes), but in reality piebaldism is a well-documented, genetically induced phenomenon in a wide range of different animal species, including quite a number of mammals. There is even at present an online photo of another piebald American black bear, a cub that had been seen with its normal, all-black mother within a forest in British Columbia, Canada, several years before its photo was posted on the *Nature Friend Magazine* website in 2021, but I am not aware of any previously publicised video footage of such a specimen. www.outdoorlife.com/conservation/video-piebald-black-bear/; <https://naturefriendmagazine.com/mailbox-june-2021-piebald-black-bear/>

THE C_{NSPIRAS}SPHERE

Surely a once-in-a-lifetime gathering of alien shape-shifting lizards was going to be catnip to conspiracy theorists, but **NOEL ROONEY** finds himself somewhat disappointed by the big day.

LIZARD KING

Everyone loves a good coronation. The recent crowning of King Charles III was a massive media event, with millions of monarchists (some admittedly temporary) glued to screens watching every detail. The denizens of the Conspirasphere were watching too; but their eyes were on rather different details.

This was practically a once in a lifetime opportunity for the eldritch zoologists of the C-sphere; the event brought together a vast gathering of the alien shape-shifting lizards that, according to those who are outliers even in the world of conspiracy, rule the world. The reptile-spotting extravaganza, sadly, turned out to be something of a damp squib, if the dearth of 'gotcha' video clips is anything to go by; personally I blame it on the weather. The unseasonably low temperatures and pouring rain were just not conducive to the basking basilisks of the New World Order's most ancient bloodlines showing their true colours.

Not just ancient, those bloodlines, but quaintly diverse, a point not lost on conspiracist commentators. HMK Charles is a direct descendant of Vlad the Impaler, for instance, and owns a house in Transylvania (oddly enough, my wife's grandfather was born in a house very nearby, so perhaps you shouldn't trust my word on the matter).

Our new monarch is quietly proud of this lineage by all accounts, and has been known to make very bad puns involving the word 'stake' on account of it. C-sphere observers were more inclined to make references to elite consumption of Adrenochrome and the blood of infants; which, one or two suggested, was what was actually going on behind the screen when the anointing was supposed to be



Suggestions that Meghan Markle appeared in disguise were mildly amusing

taking place. In which case, the banner with the cheerful motto 'All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well' on the anointing screen takes on an altogether more sinister cast.

Charles is also, according to *Burke's Peerage*, a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad – his 43rd great grandson, in fact – through the Spanish Caliphate. Given his title as 'Defender of the Faith', this seems akin to discovering that Coca Cola has shares in Pepsi (but then, apparently they actually do). A few observers saw this as evidence that Charles is an active agent of the Great Replacement.

Perhaps the biggest Coronation strangeness meme was the cameo appearance of the Grim Reaper (see p7). Video clips of an appropriately cowed harbinger of death traipsing across the church porch went viral on quite a few platforms. My favourite comment was a post I saw on one video clip suggesting the GR was being played by no less a personage than Klaus Schwab; Mr Schwab doesn't

appear on the official guest list (courtesy of *Town & Country* magazine), a surprise given he and the King appear to be quite good friends, so perhaps he was trying to slip in unnoticed. On the other hand, he might have just been popping out for a quick reset.

Suggestions that Meghan Markle attended in disguise were mildly amusing; though the elderly, bespectacled and bearded gentleman that most observers fingered as the ex-royal in mufti was not terribly convincing.

All in all I was disappointed by the efforts of the C-sphere to spoil the big day. There are endless videos showing scenes from the Coronation with voiceovers talking about Pizzagate, elite paedophilia, masonic rituals and all the conventional paraphernalia of the Illuminati, but nothing of real or novel substance.

I don't know if this is a sign of indifference (that would be unusual for the C-sphere) or an indication that conspiracists have too many other, more important fish to fry. Or perhaps the reptilian meme has become so jaded that few can be bothered to bring it up.

The only serious attempt I came across to position the event in the context of grand narrative conspiracy was an inventive exercise in loosely calendrical numerology. The coronation took place on 6 May, and one arithmetically

LEFT: So what was really going on behind that screen?

advantaged herpetologist took that fact and ran with it.

It transpires, according to this observer, that 6 May is exactly six months, six weeks and six days after the funeral of the previous monarch. And thus, QED, the Coronation was a full-blown Satanic ritual, and therefore yet another example of the wicked lizard people hiding their Luciferian roots in plain sight.

Readers with a modicum of mathematical prowess, or simply a conventional approach to using a calendar, will no doubt have noticed that embedding the number of the beast in the pedestrian pomp of a royal ceremony requires a little licence. The calculation, in its biblically inspired form, is actually correct, on its own terms. One can indeed count six months, then six weeks, then six days from the old queen's funeral to the new king's coronation. But six months and six weeks will look, to most folk, a lot like seven months and two weeks.

Some readers will perhaps recall that the number of the beast, at least as evidenced by fragments from the *Oxyrhynchus papyri*, is a somewhat flexible commodity; whether it's sufficiently flexible to allow the inclusion of seven two six is another matter, and way above my gematrial paygrade. But at the least, you have to give the proponent of this wobbly formula a few brownie points for invention.

Our world is a dark place these days: war and rumours of war, hushed anticipation of the next killer virus, imminent economic collapse. Still, I'd hate to think that the Conspirasphere has lost its sense of humour. Laughter in the face of the absurd is, after all, the mark of existentialist heroism. <https://rense.com/general97/king-lizard.php>

GIANT-SIZE MAN THINGS

Human penises and mouse testicles go for growth and a large ice phallus wows Canada



ABOVE: The phallic iceberg that appeared off the coast of Canada and was photographed by Dildo resident Ken Pretty. **BELOW:** The statue of a penis-headed Vladimir Putin erected in the village of Bell End in Worcestershire. **FACING PAGE:** Dutch musician and walking sperm bank Jonathan Jacon Meijer.

CHILLY WILLY

Social media became particularly excited by photos of a rather phallic 30ft (9m) iceberg that appeared off the coast of Canada, and went into overdrive when it drifted into the vicinity of a town in Newfoundland named Dildo. Locals dubbed it the “Dickie Berg” and photographer Ken Pretty managed to capture a picture of it using a drone the day before it collapsed, leading to a *Toronto Star* headline of “Dildo man captures phallic iceberg in Conception Bay”. *theguardian.com*, 1 May; *mirror.co.uk*, 3 May 2023.

HELLO, BIG BOY

A study led by Dr Michael Eisenberg, a urologist at Stanford Medicine, has found that the average length of the erect penis has grown 24 per cent over the last 30 years. “The million-dollar question is why this would occur,”

says Eisenberg, but notes that anything that changes our reproductive system is “something we should pay attention to and try to understand why.” The work compiled data from 75 studies conducted between 1942 and 2021, which had measured nearly 56,000 men and found that trend was apparent in every region of the world. “This was not isolated to a specific population,” he says. Other studies have shown that over the same period both testosterone levels and sperm count have fallen, and Eisenberg had expected to find that penis length would be falling in line with these, and also as men become more obese. He thinks the change might relate to earlier puberty, which gives the penis longer to grow. Dr James Hotaling from the University of Utah is not so sure, as early puberty sometimes stunts growth.



He suspects the result might be an artefact of changing measurement methods over the last 30 years, although he has no concrete evidence that this is the case. Hoatling thinks it merits further investigation, however, adding that “if the findings were the opposite,” and penises were shrinking, “everybody would be freaking out.” *eu.usatoday.com*, 15 Feb 2023.

BELL END

The village of Bell End in Worcestershire has had a penis-headed statue of Russian leader Vladimir Putin anonymously installed in the village, along with a supply of eggs to throw at it. The effigy depicts “Bellend of the Year” according to the anonymous sculptor, who is also selling miniature versions in support of Ukrainian refugees. “It has been very well received,” he said. *Sun*, 16 Dec 2022.

NIRVANA FOR MICE

Mice that were served daily doses of Pepsi and Coca-Cola were found to have larger testicles and higher testosterone levels than mice in control groups that did not drink carbonated beverages. Mice that consumed undiluted drinks also developed larger testes than those served a 50 per cent dilution. "The results indicated that higher doses of Pepsi-Cola and Coca-Cola could enhance the testis longitudinal and transverse diameter, and that they promoted testis growth of mice," said the report. The authors, though, cautioned against assuming that the results translated to humans, pointing out that other studies had shown sperm quality was reduced by 30 per cent in men drinking one litre of cola every day, and that there is a "negative effect of cola-containing beverages and caffeine-containing soft drinks on semen volume, count and concentration." *iflscience.com*, 27 Feb 2023.

ORGASM WAY

Mathematician Konstantin Blyuss and his team at the University of Sussex have published a paper in the journal *Chaos: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Nonlinear Science* that mathematically models the ideal conditions for men to reach orgasm. "We have developed the first successful mathematical model of sexual performance," says Blyuss. "Our results cover the physiological and psychological aspects required to reach climax. They reinforce, and mathematically prove, existing studies into the psychology of sex." This is the first time researchers have found a reliable way to use mathematical models to predict whether someone will reach climax. The equations are lengthy and complex, but "a key finding is that too much psychological arousal early in the process can inhibit the chance of

reaching climax," says Blyuss. "Simply put, our findings can be summarised as 'Don't overthink it'." *sciencealert.com*, 7 April 2023.

PUT IT AWAY

Dutch musician Jonathan Jacob Meijer, 41, is being sued by the Donorkind Foundation in an attempt to get him to stop his "obsessive" sperm donation. Meijer was blacklisted as a sperm donor by the Dutch Society of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in 2017 when it was discovered that he had fathered 102 children after donating to 10 different clinics in the Netherlands. He continued to donate, though, using clinics in Denmark and Ukraine, and by offering his services directly to women over social media. He could have fathered up to 550 children as a result, violating agreements with clinics that he would father a maximum of 25 children. Donorkind fear his prolific procreation increases the risk of accidental incest among his numerous offspring resulting in potential health problems for their children. *dailymail.co.uk*, 27 Mar 2023.

CUT OFF IN HIS PRIME

A 68-year-old man in Tuscany, Italy, is suing his urologist after the medic mistakenly amputated his penis, believing that he had found cancer in it. Instead, examination of the organ after its removal showed that the man was suffering from a form of syphilis that could have been treated with medication. The man, who understandably wished to remain anonymous, is demanding compensation of €400,000 (£354,000) for the loss of his penis and the resulting psychological trauma. His ordeal was described as being "as painful as it is embarrassing" by the *Corriere di Arezzo*, a local newspaper. *telegraph.co.uk*, 3 Mar 2023.



MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

269. OPPOSITES ATTRACT



The myth

Romantically and sexually, we are most drawn to and compatible with people who are unlike us. Our differences are complementary, like the hollows and bumps of jigsaw pieces.

The "truth"

There has been an astonishing amount of research done on this subject over the years and pretty much all of it comes to the same conclusion: although it seems as if every culture believes otherwise, opposites do not attract. Similarity does. Furthermore, similarity in partners is a strong indicator for longevity in a marriage. The famous 1960s 'phantom stranger' experiments showed that the likelihood of attraction between individuals grows with the degree to which their attitudes are aligned. It's hypothesised that this is because being disagreed with produces negative feelings which we then associate with the other person. Simple studies of computer dating data show that we swipe right for people like us, while analysis of digital footprints suggests that friendship, as well as mating, is more likely between people who share attitudes, vocabulary and personality traits. There is even evidence that physical similarity draws us together, which is a bit yuck if you think about it too hard. There has been little or no evidential support for the idea of complementary partners since the single 1950s study which first proposed it.

Sources

<https://theconversation.com/why-opposites-rarely-attract-74873>;
www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20220308-opposites-attract-why-the-adage-is-obsolete

Disclaimer

The attraction which beautiful young models feel towards smelly old billionaires continues to baffle scientists. Objections to this reductionist approach to loving and liking are welcome on the letters page.

Mythchaser

Which (if either) of the two popular answers explains why fish and chips no longer come wrapped in newspaper? a) People came to believe that the ink could pose a health hazard, or b) the rising value of recycled newsprint, and the shrinking of newspaper print-runs, made yesterday's headlines a commodity too precious for such a use.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

NECROLOG

This month's early departures for the undiscovered country: a working class hero of the magical underground and an admired yet modest British ufologist

JAKE STRATTON-KENT

Highly regarded internationally and known (only semi-jokingly) as “the most notorious necromancer in England”, Jake Stratton-Kent was a driving force in the 21st century ‘Grimoire Revival’. His major works included the *Encyclopædia Goetica*, a three-volume series comprising his edition of the *Grimorium Verum*; *Geosophia*, a study of the Greek origins of Goetia; and *The Testament of Cyprian the Mage*, an analysis of the roots of grimoire spirit hierarchies.

As a fiercely working class occultist, Stratton-Kent aimed in his work to return grimoire-based, spirit-centred magic and its practical real world utility to prominence in Western occultism. He was one of the major voices in the rehabilitation of this older, somewhat neglected magic that had been overlooked for much of the 20th century.

Jake's counter-culture roots ran deep. In the early 1970s he had been a member of the Wallies of Wessex, the group surrounding Wally Hope (aka Phil Russell) who organised the first Stonehenge Free Festival in 1974 (see **FT185:57**). As Jake Wally, he had been part of the group that occupied land near Stonehenge following the festival, seeking to better understand its mysteries by living in close proximity to the stones. After the eviction of the Wallies from the site, he was witness to the ongoing violent suppression of the free festival movement by the authorities.

During the 1980s, he wrote extensively on the system of English Qabala, a form of arithmancy that assigns number values to the letters of the English alphabet, discovered by occultist James Lees in 1976. The system was an attempt to uncover hidden meaning in Aleister Crowley's received text *Liber AL vel Legis*, the Book of



the Law.

2009 saw the publication of his edition of the *Grimorium Verum*, titled *The True Grimoire*, which he had reconstructed from the corrupted Italian and French versions of the Goetic text. In later works, he sought to reveal the roots of grimoire magic in the Græco-Egyptian magical papyri and the necromancy of the Ancient Greek *goês*.

While there was already growing interest in classical magic, the publication of *The True Grimoire* heralded a watershed moment and the beginning of a renaissance in grimoire studies. Jake's writing and online presence shaped many vectors of this into being, but also reflected an ongoing culture-wide process of recovery and recapitulation of older magic that had been simmering for some time and was beginning to attain critical mass.

As well as new practitioner editions of occult manuscripts that Victorian occultists

did not have access to when they constructed their interpretations of ceremonial magic, this Grimoire Revival also crossed several language barriers and included new practitioner translations that had not previously been available in English language editions.

As these currents and trajectories of the Grimoire Revival took shape, Jake Stratton-Kent continued to be a mover and shaker in the world of chthonic magic, contributing his acerbic wit and down-to-earth takes that centred practical cunning and spirit conjuration. Jake believed that magicians shouldn't be afraid to get their fingers burned in the pursuit of magic and his life and work are a testament to that burning, uncompromising fearlessness.

Jake Stratton-Kent, author and grimoire practitioner, born Essex, 27 April 1956; died 17 January 2023, Ysbyty Cwm Rhondda, Wales, aged 66.
Anthony Nine

LEFT: Jake Stratton-Kent.
RIGHT: Robert Moore.

ROBERT MOORE

British UFO researcher and ASSAP Vice Chair Robert Moore was a highly regarded, knowledgeable and popular member of the British UFO community and a significant member of the British UFO Research Association (BUFORA); indeed, Robert was one of the first wave of the group's accredited investigators as well as a signatory to the BUFORA code of practice.

Robert's own interest in the subject began in the early 1980s when he became involved in the investigation and research of British UFO sightings. He was active in the field for nearly two decades before leaving to pursue a BA degree in archaeology which he completed in 2007.

The search for proof of extraterrestrial life, though, was never far from Robert's mind, and he returned to the field in 2010 where he diversified into apparitional research. To this end, he joined the Association for the Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP) in 2010 and quickly became a well-loved and pivotal member of the executive committee. Since 2021 he had acted as Vice Chair (see **FT417:30**) under the Chairman Christian Jensen Romer, who said of him: “Robert's modesty, good grace and self-deprecating humour allowed him to thrive in a contentious field and perhaps that has been his greatest contribution, he reminds us all that by avoiding bitterness and the endless politics of the field and making friends from many different perspectives, you can promote genuine growth and findings.”

Since the dawning of the Covid era, when ASSAP began to host its popular Thursday night webinar series, Robert entertained members on a



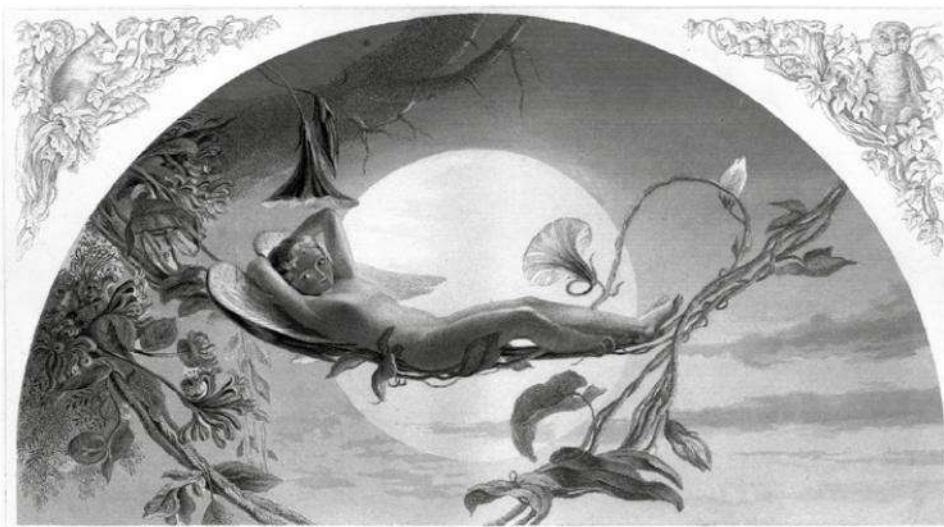
number of occasions with his witty and informative talks on subjects as diverse as “Adamski and the UFO movement”, “1947-1959: The era of the ‘Flying Discs’” and “The A39 Haunting: Thomas Pocock, Ghostly Highwayman”. Robert wrote an extensive account of the latter in 2021 for the ASSAP Anomaly publication.

One of the works of which he was proudest was one which, sadly, he was not to see published in his lifetime. ‘Project Foxfire’ was a comprehensive study of British UFO sightings throughout a defined ‘seven phase’ period from the Middle Ages to the present day (see FT425:28) and which will now be published in due course as a collaborative tribute between ASSAP and BUFORA.

When Robert had any spare time away from his working life and his twin passions of history and archaeology, he could be found immersed in the fantasy worlds of wargaming and Role-Playing Games (RPG) both as a designer and player. He had worked on three immersive RPG works as a designer, including ‘Cousins War’, ‘Thriller 70’ and ‘Futures’. He was a great fan of Kate Bush whose music had provided the soundtrack to his life (see FT424:29) and to quote her words, when we think of Robert we know for sure that: “He’s here again, the man with the child in his eyes”.

Robert Moore, Vice Chair of the Association for the Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP), renowned British UFO researcher, born Somerset, 3 Sept 1968; died Bridgewater, Somerset, 1 April 2023, aged 55.

Claire Davy



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

IMMORTALS AMONG US #2

As noted in the last FT, I have recently been collecting accounts of the immortals among us. Folk who refuse to die and who keep turning up through the generations like a bad penny. These undying individuals come in various forms, but in Britain at least the most common type is an itinerant who believes himself to be ‘the Wandering Jew’, the figure that Christ cursed to walk the Earth until His second coming.

Said WJs are usually the most marvellous shysters. Take, for instance, the WJ who in the 1830s used to go from farmhouse to farmhouse in Monmouthshire: his “conversation is chiefly about the end of the world, and occasionally he frightens people almost to death, as of course every word that he speaks is the truth, as the Wandering Jew cannot tell a falsehood”.

But in collating the material I came across one strange pattern that for a second (though just for one second, mind!), made me wonder. Consider the following data points. In the mid-1700s in the north-east of England there was a tramp who called himself the ‘Wandering Jew’. He walked through the streets (probably of Newcastle) “with a long Train of Boys at his Heels, muttering ‘Poor John alone! Poor John alone!’ in a Manner singularly plaintive”. Consider now our second exhibit. In the late 1700s in Bath a

man also known as the WJ traipsed around: “In all his migrations, he was never heard to utter anything but ‘Poor Joe’s alone! Poor Joe’s alone!’” Then, third, in the early 1800s, another WJ turned up in Scotland: “His appearance was... extremely dirty, and [he] had usually a motley train of idlers at his heels, while he uttered, in an idiotic but most pathetic tone, ‘Poor John alone! Poor John alone!’”

We certainly need an explanation for this pattern, but what?

I’m going to rattle out, machine gun style, four possibilities. One: a long-lived homeless man moved from Newcastle to Bath and then up to Scotland. Two: ‘poor x alone’ was a mendicant cry. I’ve not found any evidence of this, but consider Edgar playing ‘poor Tom’ (also in the third person) in *King Lear*. Three: the Scottish WJ is a misremembering of the

Newcastle WJ. Notice the hangers-on in both accounts and how typical it would be of a London author to get Newcastle and Scotland mixed up in his memory! If we accept that kind of confusion then the similarity between the Newcastle and the Bath WJ could just be, I suppose, a coincidence.

Then, there is the fourth explanation. But, no, the fourth explanation doesn’t bear thinking about. That way pure unadulterated madness lies.

Simon is co-presenter of the *Boggart and Banshee* podcast.

“IN ALL HIS
MIGRATIONS
HE WAS NEVER
HEARD TO UTTER
ANYTHING BUT
‘POOR JOE’S
ALONE!’”



Windmills of your mind

NIGEL WATSON finds UFO apologists lobbying Washington legislators and the Trinity case crashing

NO CREDIBLE EVIDENCE

Sean M Kirkpatrick, director of the All-Domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO), testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities on 19 April 2023. He outlined how his department had received 650 reports of UAPs seen at a distance of between 15,000 to 25,000ft (4,600 to 7,600m), and stated that half of them had been prioritised for further study. Kirkpatrick cautioned that: "The majority of unidentified objects reported to AARO demonstrate mundane characteristics of balloons, unmanned aerial systems, clutter, natural phenomena or other readily explainable sources."

Such factors as human deception and illusions, or sensor malfunctions and intentional interference were stated by Kirkpatrick as possible causes of 'anomalous' UAPs. As examples, he showed video clips of UAPs in South Asia and the Middle East that were the product of limited data combined with sensor artefacts. For the record he stated: "AARO has found no credible evidence thus far of extraterrestrial activity, off-world technology or objects that defy the known laws of physics."

www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3368109/dod-working-to-better-understand-resolve-anomalous-phenomena/

INCREDIBLE EVIDENCE

The jig is up for the stunning Trinity UFO crash case, as promoted by Jacques Vallée and Paola Harris in their book *Trinity: The Best-Kept Secret*. James Clarkson looked into this case when he was a State Director for the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) as part of a Special Assignments Team (SAT). In a revealing blog he notes that when he was given this assignment: "We were instructed to ONLY investigate PART of the claims made by Paola Harris about the alleged TRINITY UFO Crash Site. She stated that she believed that some type of specially created noxious weeds had been planted at the crash site to deter future investigators from finding the metal fragments of the crashed alien spaceship that the military had failed to recover. We were NOT to investigate the report by the witness Jose Padilla about his recovery of a fragment of a crashed alien spacecraft in 1945."

Clarkson did not find any particularly noxious weeds, and he thought a picture taken of a MUFON investigator wearing a Hazmat suit at the site was purely theatrical rather than scientific; furthermore, despite instructions to the contrary, he did look at



other elements of the case and concluded that the so-called alien artefact was a windmill part made by the Aeromotor Company of Chicago, and that the testimony of Jose Padilla was the only evidence for the story.

Douglas Dean Johnson goes into even more detail about the case, and highlights the faults in the crash story given by Padilla and Remigio (Reme) Baca, aka 'Ray Baca'. They have, along with William P 'Billy' Brophy, according to Johnson, "all engaged in multiple gross fabrications, it would be folly to attach any credence whatever to any of the oft-conflicting versions of the UFO crash-recovery events that they have described."

The story was made-up in 2003 as a money-making project, and it developed over the years. There are many flaws in the tale that could have been easily checked. Padilla, for example, claimed he was shot fighting in the Korean War, when he would have been aged 16 at the most. He also said he served in the California Highway Patrol for 32 years, which Johnson says is not supported by any evidence and is highly unlikely. Vallée and Harris not only did not check these basic facts but also edited out references to the finding of alien bodies and even a living alien at the site as it did not fit their narrative.

jamesclarksonufo.com/ufo-news/trinity-1945-ufo-hoax/; <https://douglasjohnson.ghost.io/crash-story-the-trinity-ufo-crash-hoax/>

EDUCATING CONGRESS

Ron James, MUFON's director of media relations, has claimed his organisation had at least 100 meetings with legislators in Washington DC in which they shared data and reports about UAPs. James admitted that MUFON pushed for the AARO to push back its

LEFT: Was the Trinity crash site artefact a bit of alien tech... or just an Aeromotor windmill part?.

historical review of UAPs to 1945 so that the Trinity case could be included in the study.

Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-Wis. and a member of the Armed Services Committee) was the actual person who introduced this amendment so that there would be a more comprehensive study of the UAP timeline and bring to light what we do and don't know about incidents involving the US military.

No doubt Gallagher had been persuaded by MUFON's lobbying campaign. As part of this process it employed the lobbying firm A10 Associates. The details are unclear as to whether Jessica Tocco, CEO of A10 Associates, approached MUFON or MUFON approached her. Anyway, the outcome was that in 2022 MUFON paid Tocco's firm \$80,000 to lobby Congress on the UAP issue.

A10's website notes, without mentioning MUFON: "In May of 2022, A10 Associates was honoured to have aided in bringing clients to the first congressional committee public hearing on UAPs (unidentified aerial phenomena) since 1966. A10 played a critical role earlier in 2022 at the nation's capital while working on the NDAA (National Defense Authorization Act) which now requires the military to establish a permanent UFO research office and take a series of steps to collect and investigate reports of UAPs."

In January 2023, Tocco appeared as a legislation expert on season 19 of *Ancient Aliens* and was put on MUFON's Board of Directors. Will her efforts to get the Trinity crash case officially investigated be worth MUFON's \$80,000 investment or will it leave them all looking very stupid?

docs.google.com/document/d/1lisLvk4014A4o18PIWQtntEYnKnkb5rzpFpPAVWuTxS

NASA'S UAP STUDY

NASA's UAP Independent Study Team is releasing a report "to evaluate and study UAPs going forward by using data, technology and the tools of science. It is not a review of previous UAP incidents. The report will be published with the intent to inform NASA on what possible data could be collected in the future, and how it can be collected, to shed light on UAP".

That's not very satisfactory for those who think NASA has been part of the historical UAP cover-up; best get MUFON on their case...

science.nasa.gov/uap



Preserving our UFO legacy

The death of a ufologist reminds JENNY RANGLES that we need to protect our ufological legacy

The last few months have been tough ones for British ufology, as we have lost several people who have played a major part in its most active years. However, the loss of Robert Moore (see obit. p28), hit hard because he was both a good friend and relatively young and it came out of the blue. The fact that many of his files were lost to the rubbish skip when his flat had to be emptied quickly added to the sadness; it was unfortunate timing, as they could have been preserved if this terrible loss had occurred just days later. A visit from Sweden's AFU (Archives for the Unexplained; see FT330:46-49) team was imminent and they missed the opportunity to collect and digitise these precious records by just a week. AFU pioneered the archiving of UFO-related materials. They have collated files and other artefacts linked to the history of the subject and made accessible as much as they can, sharing the rich history of books and magazines this field has created over the past 75 years.

Clas Svahn and his team have visited the UK on a grand tour of Europe every couple of years, gathering up whatever they could to expand this vital archive. I have been happy to help them in any way I can, as have many others in the UK. They arrived in the UK in April after a three-year absence caused by Covid travel restrictions. It was lovely to see them again, and I always enjoy the extensive searching of long-hidden boxes – some not inspected in years – to see what I have left to offer.

Which brings me to the question of what more we could be doing in the UK to ensure that decades of UFO research is not lost to time and mortality.

There are obvious things to consider and one is the change from paper records to digital data. When I first joined a UFO group in the 1960s, computers and the Internet were still mostly science fiction and not in everyday homes. It has taken just a few decades for the writing of information on paper to be gradually replaced by typing a report online and hoping it will survive in the ether as long as a book or magazine might do. We are yet to discover how long the Internet age will last or what will follow it, but it is not impossible that there will be another data revolution that will create an even bigger shift in how instant reporting and long-term legacy coexist.

In my time I have seen big changes in ufology. Back in 1974 I started to edit a magazine called *Northern UFO News*, whose



I always enjoy searching through long-hidden boxes, some not inspected in years

main task was to report ongoing events in the local UFO groups in an era when every major town had its own. The result was an archive of thousands of investigations by these groups, which I summarised over the next 27 years, until I was forced to stop issuing the journal to become a full time carer.

In 2017 I decided to revive *Northern UFO News* in order to reach the milestone of issue 200. But those last few issues were created in a very different way to the previous 190. I created a website called Ozfactorbooks.com (primarily to promote the book I had worked on with Alan Godfrey about his 1980 abduction experience), and this was the platform I used to bring back *Northern UFO News*: I simply created the new edition every month or two and posted it on the website, free to view. It's a method many ufologists use today.

Currently, those issues are still out there and easily accessible in cyberspace. But I have no idea for how long. They could simply vanish into the ether one day for all I know, as there are no 'hard copies'.

The world of UFO reporting has changed a lot too, with online methods bringing increased ease of documenting cases. But there is a balance to be struck between open access for all and the need for witness security. Not only do we have to worry about material potentially vanishing into the informational ether, but we also have to consider witness protection, which means that some aspects of our data always will need stricter safeguarding than granting instant access to anyone with a

LEFT: Sweden's AFU works hard to save and preserve precious ufological materials.

computer or smartphone.

Even as far back as the 1980s we at the local UFO group in Manchester (MUFORA) saw the problem. We wanted to make our two decades of data available to others for research, but had to give witnesses privacy when requested. We did find ways to do this and allow access under supervision as we persuaded a university building in the city to house our files and allow access for research on a day when someone could be there to supervise and explain the privacy rules.

By the early 2000s, our local group had, like so many others, changed into an online chat forum and other arrangements were made. But there has since been excellent progress, with the release of the MoD files into public access, supervised by UFO researcher and university lecturer David Clarke, being the highlight. It is good to see that David is expanding his archive work, having obtained space at Sheffield Hallam University to store a growing number of files where the data can be safely held; he already has files from groups such as UFOIN, a kind of UFO supergroup with researchers from several then fading local teams who banded together. Hopefully, this will expand within the limits of the university's generosity.

BUFORA (the British UFO Research Association) – the longest surviving national group in the UK with which I was long associated – has done good work digitising their decades of magazines, with case reports included, and made these accessible via their own site. I am not sure where the actual 'real' files are stored now, but I know that Gloria Dixon, the longest running Director of Investigation in BUFORA history, has done a superb job in keeping this all ticking over for the last quarter century and has developed data resources locally in the North East.

So ufology is coming to terms with the necessity to protect its legacy, preserving the past for the benefit of the researchers of the future. There will be new challenges ahead and who knows what new technology will emerge to assist our plans? But the debate on how we preserve this past so that future generations will have access to what the previous ones took for granted is one we need to start having now, as tomorrow could well be too late.

Postcards from Fairyland

Nina Antonia takes a sentimental journey around the British Isles in search of places linked with the fairy folk and explores the way these enchanted landscapes were captured in thousands of postcards celebrating, and sometimes creating, our folkloric heritage

In 1846, the folklorist Jabez Allie wrote an intriguing treatise entitled *On the Ignis Fatuus, or Will-o'-the-Wisp, and the Fairies*. While studying sightings of the strange and sinister Wisp, Allie listed all of the areas, including hamlets, fields and hills, that owed their names to fairy lore and poetry. A quaint roll-call of Queen Mab's diminutive courtiers from Michael Drayton's *Nymphidia* and the "elves, urchins, goblins all, and little fairies" who inhabited the pages of *The Life of Robin Goodfellow* (anon) were to be found at all points of the compass. However, it was Robin Goodfellow in the guise of Puck, Shakespeare's "Merry wanderer of the Night", who was most prominent on England's map of fairy.

According to Allie: "There are places called Upper Puck-Hill, and Lower Puck-Hill, in Acton Beauchamp, Puck Meadow, in Hallow, Puck Hall Field and Far Puck Hall Piece in Hartlebury, Puck Croft in Stock and Bradley, Upper and Lower Puck Close, in Himbleton; Puck Croft in Powick; Puck Lane in Stoke Prior..." In total, he counted over 50 places with Puck in the name, rounding off his list with Pucknell's Close in Solihull, while Cwm Pwcca, or 'The Devil's Bridge', in Wales got a special mention. Steeped in folklore, Ireland possessed its own variation upon the Puck theme, known as the Pookha/Phouka. Allie dutifully recorded the stairs, castles and waterfalls belonging to the shapeshifting Pookha, who most commonly took the form of a malevolent horse – woe betide anyone who tried to ride it – but could also morph into an eagle or a bat. Although Brownies were predominant in Scotland, Puck still had his place with a feral yet picturesque glen in Dunoon that bears his name to this day. Despite



LEFT: The Elfin Grotto in Heysham, Lancashire.

Folklore in Fashion

In the first week of October 1891, the newspapers covered the International Folklore Congress, which was held in London. Once the realm of fusty antiquarians, folklore had shaken off its dowdy past and was briefly fashionable. The *Daily Mail* attempted to summarise

Elfin England was imperilled by a network of railway lines bringing visitors to formerly remote spots

England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales being wreathed in fairy references, Jabez Allie sounded a warning note in the essay's brief preface with the hope that "it might elicit some further information relative to our fast expiring Fairy Mythology".

To a degree Allie's plea did not go unheard, as the years 1870-1914 were to prove golden for the gathering and disseminating of folklore, which included a vast swathe of fairy beliefs. As the end of the century approached it was clear that the future would be an industrial one, which prompted a great harvesting of previously unrecorded peasant beliefs by folklorists. The light was fast fading on farming communities whose fortunes had depended on the spirits of the land and the appeasement of older deities, even as the country people went to church on Sunday.

the vaguely esoteric subject matter for its readers: "The peculiarity of Folklore is to approach the whole subject from the side of ancient practices, beliefs, and rites, surviving either among the least educated and most stationary classes; or among the educated who retain or have borrowed their superstitions." However, it was the survival of fairy lore that was of utmost import to Jabez Allie. As long as Hob, Tib, Pinck, Pin, Jin, Dobbins and Grim ("when candles burne both blue and dim, old folks will say, 'Here's fairy Grim!'" – *Robin Goodfellow*) were still on the map, a semblance of their presence remained. Sometimes the fairy nature of a place was hidden, albeit in a not particularly obscure way. For example, Pluckley, in Kent, sees Puck at large in a village long considered one of the most ghost-infested in the UK (see FT87:53, 308:70, 386:35, 388:43-44). The association between fairy locales and hauntings is mentioned several times by Allie.

Despite the folklore vogue, half a century after Jabez Allie's essay was published what remained of elfin England was imperilled not least by a growing network of railway lines bringing commerce and visitors to formerly remote spots. It's been said that the last few fairies, with their ultra-sensitive hearing, loathed and feared 'Puffing Billy', a popular euphemism for the noisy, smoke-billowing



ABOVE: "A sense of bygone enchantment" – visitors to the Fairy Glen near Nunthorpe, North Yorkshire. BELOW: Fairy Glen, Garwick, Isle of Man.

steam trains. Any remaining fairies began their final retreat, following their kith and kin back to the mysterious realm whence they came.

The first wave of departures had been around 1790, according to Hugh Miller, author of *The Old Red Sandstone* (1847). Miller's folkloric anecdote known as 'The Fairies' Farewell' has a faded, picture-book poignancy in its depiction of a young boy and his little sister who witness a fairy-horse drawn cavalcade of wild-haired 'Gude Neighbours' one Sunday, when everyone else is at church. The tale concludes when the boy asks "What are ye, little mannie? And where are ye going?"

The last rider stops to answer. "Not of the race of Adam," says the creature, turning for a moment in his saddle. "The People of Peace shall never more be seen in Scotland."

Where poetic vision had once shaped the countryside, now it was the turn of councilors, grey in thought and deed, to expunge the remaining antiquated fairy names with titles that made sense (perish the thought), either in tribute to various dignitaries or reflecting local businesses: Cornmarket Way, Mason's Road or Butcher's Street.

A Passion for Postcards

However, all was not yet lost. The turn of the century coincided with a passion for sending and collecting postcards, which were still a relative novelty. Of the limited themes available, postcards depicting 'Fairy' beauty spots were immensely popular. Overnight, 'Fairy Glens', 'Fairy Lanes', 'Fairy Dells', 'Fairy



Wells' and 'Fairy Waterfalls' materialised, as did a few 'Pixie's Parlours' and 'Pixie Caves', plus 'Boggart's Hole Clough', 'Hob's Hole', 'Witches Road' and 'Witches Tump'. Some had existed long before the postcard craze, but previously there had been no real way to promote them beyond a local level. It was also easier to capture the public's imagination with fairytale words they were familiar with rather than obscure sprites with archaic sounding names from Shakespeare's day, Puck notwithstanding. He, of course, could

also count Rudyard Kipling as an admirer. Kipling's best-selling children's book, *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906), rejuvenated that which was already ingrained in the English psyche.

In common with those cheap ceramic pixie ornaments sold in their thousands at UK tourist spots, fairy postcards eventually ended up in the cultural exile of 'Nana's Choice'. But it was an undeserved fate. As with all things that slip through our grasp like grains in an hourglass, it is time to re-evaluate postcards from Fairyland. The better ones invoke a bygone enchantment, particularly those featuring children. In their quaint clothes, absorbed by their surroundings, they are subjects of the intangible, reminiscent of the schoolgirls in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

Fairy Glens

Until very recently, one could purchase century-old postcards for next to nothing and enjoy being the owner of a genuine historical artefact. However, images of more obscure locations are becoming scarcer, while prices are rising, and not just for the rarer items. One spot in particular, 'The Fairy Glen' in Betws-y-Coed, North Wales, has saturated the postcard market for many years. No one can deny the beauty of the area, which became the most famous of the Fairy Glens, drawing thousands of visitors each year to the deeply wooded valley partitioned by the rushing River Conwy. It was here that the fairies were supposed to play on the boulders in the sparkling torrents.

Betws-y-Coed looks much the same as it did the day the first Fairy Glen postcard was



LEFT: The mother of all Fairy Glens at Betws-y-Coed in North Wales. BELOW: A particularly fanciful postcard showing the Fairy Glen as a 'health resort' for the little people. ABOVE: While some postcards tapped into existing folklore, others, like this one of Loch Fee, simply evoked the twilight world of the fairies.

sent. Perhaps it was thought wiser not to mention the fate of the poor water-beast, or Afanc, lured from the safety of his pool above Betws-y-Coed in a cruel honey-trap. Soothed by the promises of a young maiden, the Afanc fell asleep with his head on her knees, only to wake bound in chains. He managed to shake off the shackles as if they were ribbons and dash back to his pool. Alas, the creature's ordeal was not yet over; his pursuers lassoing him with a chain attached to two oxen. An argument broke out among the Afanc's captors, each of them claiming to have carried the heaviest load. Lifting his weary head, the water-beast interjected, bringing the row to a close: "Had it not been for the oxen pulling, the Afanc had never left the pool." Despite the water-beast's diplomatic skills, he was then dragged off to Llyn Cwm Ffynnon Las (the Lake of the Dingle of the Green Well), which appears to have been used as an aquatic holding tank for other unwanted uncanny creatures.

The Afanc's sorry tale was chronicled in 1693 by the antiquary Edward Llwyd, who wrote "you must understand that some take the Afanc to be a corporeal demon; but I am sufficiently satisfied that there is an animal of the same name, which is called in English a beaver." If there is a conclusion to the tale, it is surely that the harassed Afanc lacked fairy glamour, despite being able to talk; similarly the Glen's alternative and older name 'Ffos Anoddun', meaning a deep ditch, was also disposed of. Somewhere in the Glen at Betws-y-Coed was a hidden entrance to Fairyland and it is probably still there.

However, not every postcard is directly connected to folklore. Rather, they capture a twilight sense of the ineffable, as in the case of the dreamy, fairy-haunted, colour-tinted 'Evening - Loch Fee, Connemara' by Milton Postcards. Some featured woody beauty spots that evoked a sense of Fairy, and many are a stark reminder of the price of 'progress'; for example, the once leafy 'Fairy

Betws-y-Coed looks much the same as it did the day the first Fairy Glen postcard was sent



Lane' in Manchester, which must surely have been a haven for blackberry picking, has been reduced to a standard row of houses where nature is subservient to suburbia.

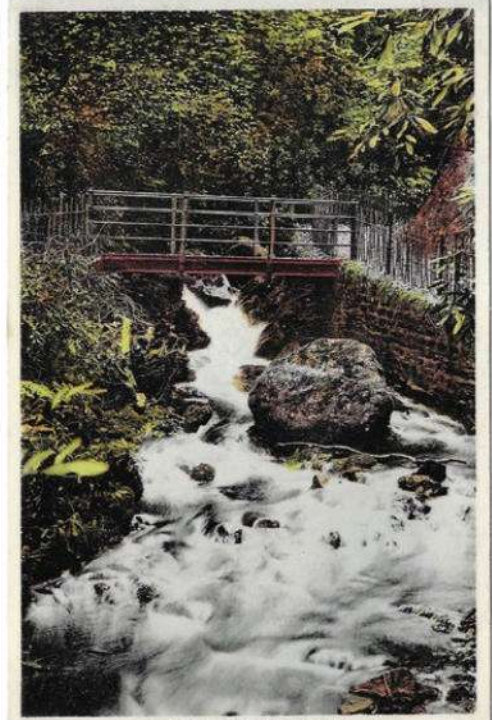
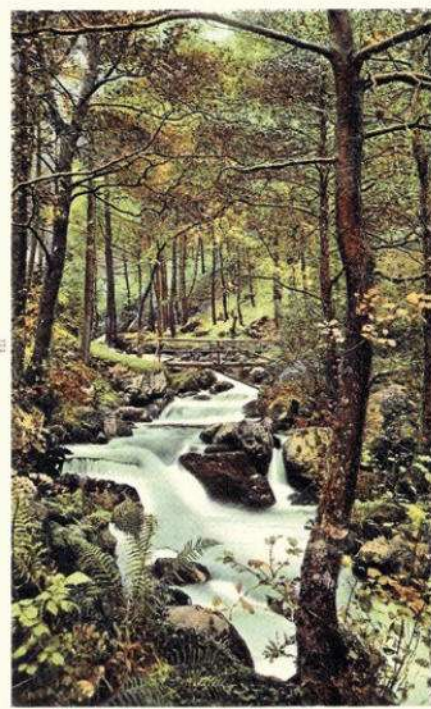
Children's author Alan Garner, writing in the early 1960s, anticipated the eradication of legend and myth from the landscape and kept it alive in his books set around Alderley Edge and Manchester. Where WAGs now

visit beauty salons, wizards once walked. As late as 1886, the *Manchester Examiner* reported that a local wizard had been employed by the Midland Railway Company to divine water for them. Equipped with a traditional hazel dowsing rod, the wizard came up with the goods. In five years of searching I've only managed to locate two wizard postcards, one being a depiction of a deeply forested 'Wizard's Glen' in Mulgrave Woods, Whitby, where both a hob and a tetchy fairy called Jeannie were supposed to have dwelled. As with many attractive locations, Mulgrave Woods - like The Fairy Glen - is now privately owned, though open to the public at specific times on specific days.

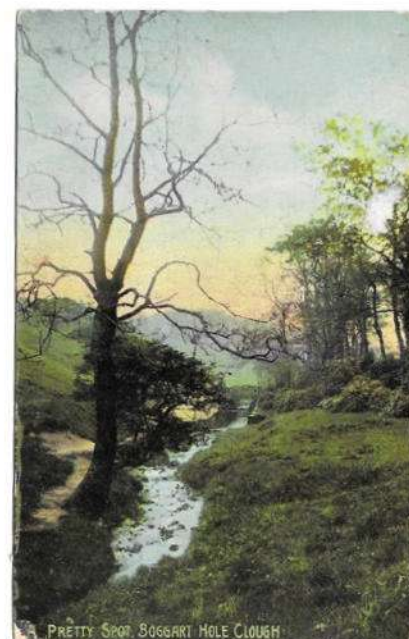
No map of fairy postcards would be complete without Alderley Edge, one of the locations where Arthur and his Knights are alleged to sleep deep underground. 'The Wizard's Well' of Alderley, which was featured on postcards, is no longer quite as spruce or revered as it once was, despite the natural rock formation around it that resembles a wizard's face; English Heritage attempted to replicate the effect at Tintagel, but nature's magic can't be copied.

Boggarts and Hobs

Another popular postcard with a wealth of folklore attached is 'Boggart Hole Clough'. Once a dense wooded dell situated in Blackley on the outskirts of Manchester, the postcards reveal its transformation into a well maintained Victorian park. Like The Fairy Glen, Boggart Hole Clough was so popular that many different images of it exist, showing the park gates, featuring a straight-backed uniformed park attendant, an ornate fountain, a peacock and a cafeteria. As late as 1966, on the very doorstep of the Swinging Sixties, black and white 'Multi-view' postcards were being produced of the trim little enclave with the strange history. In *A Dictionary of Fairies* (1976) the great fairyologist Katherine Briggs defines the



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The Wizard's Glen, Mulgrave Woods, Whitby, Yorkshire; The Wizard's Well, Alderley Edge, Cheshire; Fairy Glen, Penmaenmawr, Conwy, Wales; A Westcountry Footway; Morag's Fairy Glen, Dunoon, Argyll and Bute, Scotland; Fairy Lane, Manchester; Elfin Glen, Ramsey, Isle of Man.



ABOVE AND RIGHT: Boggart Hole Clough, on the outskirts of Manchester.

boggart as being a “mischievous Brownie, almost exactly like a poltergeist in his habits”. Usually described as ‘rough fairies’, boggarts and brownies were hardy, hairy and temperamental. Of the hob, hobgoblin or hobthrush (see FT330:58-59), Briggs noted: “Hob is the general name for a tribe of kindly, beneficent and occasionally mischievous spirits to which the Brownie belongs.” Hob spots, including ‘Hob Moor Lane’ in Small Heath, Birmingham, and the mysterious ‘Hob Hole’, Castleton, Yorkshire, were well served by postcards, as was ‘Hob’s Aerie’, an early 19th century house, still standing, with a timber-framed wing dating back to the 1700s.

Located at Quicksie Hill, near Uttlesford in Essex, the Grade II listed Hob’s Aerie is an address steeped in fairy lore, Quick being one of Queen Mab’s retinue in *Nymphidia*. Could it all just be coincidence? An historical word check on Google defines ‘Aerie’ as an early form of ‘dairy’. In *Hobgoblin and Sweet Puck – Fairy Names and Natures* (1974) Gillian Edwards notes of the Hob: “He had a preference for working on farms and in dairies, where he sometimes drank the cream.” Today, Hob’s Aerie remains a working farm, with or without a little extra help. However, while there are plenty of Hob postcards none could surpass the notoriety of Boggart Hole Clough, possibly because the tale is so rich in detail that it has become a folklore staple.

As this article is about postcards rather than boggarts – who have of late been featured in *Fortean Times* (FT416:30-43) – I shall not dally long over this tricky sprite who became more of a hindrance than a help to hardworking farmer George Cheetham and his family. According to an account by folklorist Crofton Croker, the Clough Boggart was prone to “scaring the maids, worrying his men, and frightening the poor children out of their senses, so that at last, not even a mouse durst shew himself indoors at the farm, as he valued his whiskers, after the clock has struck 12.” Unusually tardy when

The market in pixie paraphernalia quickly descended into tourist tat

it came to the chores, the boggart stole the children’s bread and butter and caused chaos after dark. Eventually, the farmer called it quits and decided to move. On the day of departure, their neighbour, John Marshall, spotted the Cheethams with their cart piled high with belongings, and asked why they were leaving. After confiding to John about the squeaky-voiced boggart’s antics, Farmer Cheetham concluded: “We’re forced to flit, like.” In Thomas Crofton Croker’s words, Cheetham “had got this far in his complaint when, behold, a shrill voice, from a deep upright churn, called out, ‘Ay, ay, neighbour, we’re flitting, you see’.” Realising it was pointless to move with the boggart in tow, Farmer Cheetham decided to stay put.

I lived in Blackley for 12 months in the early 1980s and at the time knew nothing of its supernatural past. Even so, there was a sense of invisible oppression about the place, where nothing seemed quite right. This time, it was I who flitted, never to return.

Pixy-Led

What keeps folklore intriguing are the regional variations. Somerset, Devon and Cornwall are home to the pixies, described by Robert Hunt in *The Popular Romances of The West of England* (1908) as: “Mischievous but in all respects a very harmless creation, who appears to live a rollicking life amidst the luxuriant scenes of those beautiful counties.” According to storyteller Ruth Tongue, there had once been fairies in the area, but the pixies triumphed over them in

a pitched battle for the territory. Unfortunately, the market in pixie paraphernalia quickly descended into tourist tat, despite the beauty and mystery of the West Country. There are however some interesting curios to be found including ‘The Pixies’ Cross’ on Whitchurch Down, Dartmoor. There are several theories about the origin of the stark stone cross, the most enchanting being that it was donated by a generous benefactor to aid travellers on the moors. Pixies, being fond of pranks, liked nothing better than to befuddle people and lead them astray, hence the expression ‘Pixy-Led’. However, it is more likely that the cross was a guide post for monks walking between Tavistock Abbey and Buckfast Abbey. Unfortunately, in common with many of the sites once considered to be fairy terrain, the Whitchurch Down Cross is now at the centre of a golf course; a fate shared by Bogle Kno’ in Scotland, which no longer appears to exist.

Postscript

The story of fairy postcards reflects the vanishing of our countryside and the acquisition of beauty spots both by private owners and heritage trusts, while a proliferation of profitable golf courses attracts players from around the world to what once was common land.

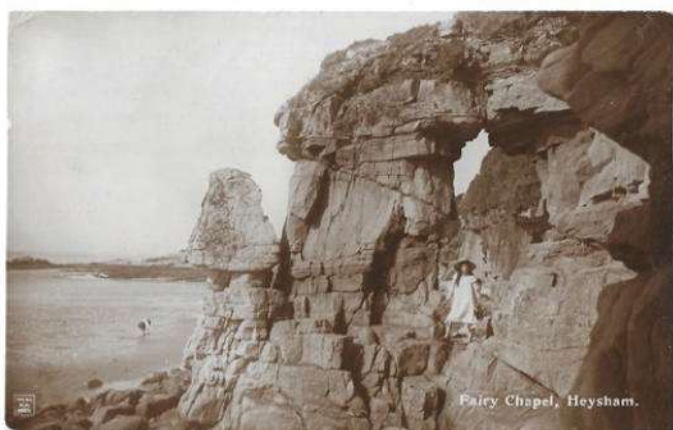
Some collect postcards for their monetary value, but for me they provide a sometimes magical glimpse of the past. Where else would you find such gems as Cothelstone’s ‘Fairy Cupboards’ or ‘The Home of Nial, King of the Fairies’ at Malin Head, and even an historical record of Gerald Gardner, the founding father of Wicca, standing by the Wishing Well at the Witches Mill, Castletown, Isle of Man?

✦ NINA ANTONIA is the author of *The Greenwood Faun* (2018) and editor of *Incurable: The Haunted Writings of Lionel Johnson, the Decadent Era’s Dark Angel* (2019).



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Hob's Aerie, Arkesden, Essex; Boggle Hole Youth Hostel, Robin Hood's Bay, Yorkshire; Home of Nial, King of the Fairies, Malin Head, Donegal, Ireland; The Pixie's Cavern, Prussia Cove, Cornwall; Gnomes in Rock Garden, New Romney Station, Kent; Fairy Cupboards, Cotherstone, Barnard Castle, County Durham; Pixies Cross, Whitchurch Down, Dartmoor, Devon.

A FORTEAN FAIRYLAND POSTCARD GAZETTEER

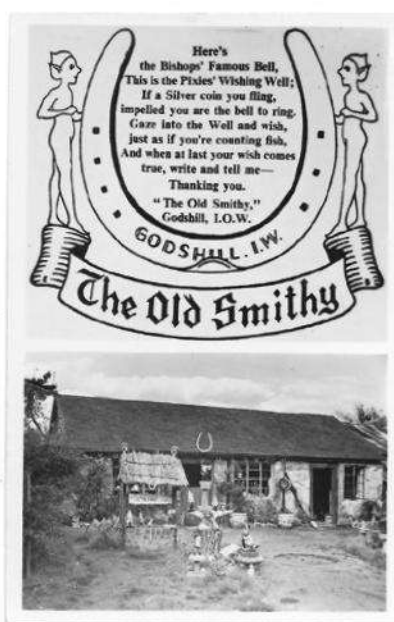


ENGLAND

'Fairy Wood', Claverton, Bath
'Hob Moor Road', Small Heath, Birmingham
'Hob Moor Lane', Yardley, Birmingham
'Fairyland', Clifton, Bristol
'Fairyland', Aston Clinton Park, Vale of Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire

'Goblin Tower', Chester, Cheshire
'The Wizards Well', Alderley Edge, Cheshire
'The Pixie's Cavern', Prussia Cove, Cornwall
'The Pixie Shop', Boscastle, Cornwall
'Pixies Pathway', West Country, Cornwall
'Pixieland' (café), Kilkhampton, Cornwall
'Fairy Steps', Arnside-Beetham, Cumbria.
(The route crossing the narrow steps is part of a corpse road, wending its way past the magical Underlaid Woods. The area is said to be fairy haunted and if you can hop up the steps without touching the sides (an almost impossible task), they will grant you a wish.)
'Fairy Glen', Roose, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria
'Fairy Glen', Borrowdale, Cumbria
'Fairy Glen', Grasmere, Cumbria
'Fairy Dell', Buttermere, Cumbria
'Fairy Glen', Buttermere, Cumbria
'Fairy Well', Penrith, Eden Hall, Cumbria

'Fairy Glen', Moscar Moors, Derbyshire
(although home to monoliths, the area was popular for grouse hunting in the Victorian era. After a century of peace on the peaks 'luxury grouse hunting' has returned courtesy of the Duke and Duchess of Rutland. One must assume the fairies have long scarpered)
'Fairy Cross', Bideford, Devon
'Fairy Glen', Chudleigh Rocks, Devon
'Fairy Cove', Paignton, Devon
'Pixie's Cave', Chudleigh, Devon
'Witches Bowl', Dawlish Devon
'Pixie's Cross', Whitchurch Down, Dartmoor, Devon
'Pixie's Parlour', Ottery St Mary, Devon (pixies accused of kidnapping bell ringers; the poet



Coleridge visited and signed his initials on the entrance to the cave; every year there is a Pixy Day featuring a race with children dressed as pixies; or is that pixies dressed as children?)
'The Fairy Glen', Hurn, Bournemouth, Dorset
'The Pixie's Café', Tolpuddle, Dorset
'The Fairy Glen', Canford Cliffs, Dorset
'The Fossil Forest', Lulworth, Dorset (was known locally as 'The Fairy Dancers' as they liked to dance amongst the rocks according to Janet Bord in *Fairy Sites*.
'Puncknowle', Dorset (find Puck Hidden in the name!)
'Witchampton', Dorset

'Fairy Cupboards', Cotherstone, Barnard Castle, Durham
'Fairy Dell', Holwick, Middleton-in-Teesdale, Durham

'Hob's Aerie', Arkesden, Quicksie Hill, Essex
'Elves Cottages', Sayers Common, Essex
'Puckeridge Hill', Aldershot, Hampshire

'Pook Lane', Havant, Hampshire

'Fairy Glen', Bishopstone, Herne Bay, Kent
(The dream is over as far as this 'Fairy Glen' is concerned. A postcard, dated 1957, shows a drab patch at the back of a caravan site, featuring a miniature windmill, crazy paving, an office chair and a tiny thatched cottage. No fairies in evidence, presumably absconded.)
'Pluckley', Kent
'Bogle House' and Bogle Road, Lynsted, Kent

'Fairy Bridge', Ballalona, Isle of Man
'Fairy Glen' Garwick, Isle of Man
'Elfin Glen' Ramsey, Isle of Man (there are still contemporary accounts of fairy sightings)
'Wishing Well, Witches Mill', Isle of Man (The postcard is unusually credited as copyright Gerald Gardner.)
'Fairy Hill', Port St Mary, Isle of Man
'Pixies Wishing Well', The Old Smithy, Godshill, Isle of Wight (it was said that the church of Godshill was to have been built on a level field but it was a fairy dancing ground so the Little People dragged the foundation stones up the hill, which is where the church now stands)
'Fairy Court', Shanklin, Isle of Wight (still standing, now apartments)
'Puckpool' Ryde, Isle of Wight (where Puck by his pleadings in a high-pitched voiced convinced Father Martin of St Helen's that he was a girl in peril. The good father was led a merry dance, ending up in a marsh, thanks to Puck's impish antics; see also 'Puckpool Park and Shore' at same location)
'Puckcaster Cove', Isle of Wight (part of the Undercliff, a large coastal landscape and a haven for flora and fauna found nowhere else in the UK. It is also very popular with fairies according to author Cassandra Eason in *A complete Guide to Fairies and Magical Beings*. Janet Bord in *Fairy Sites* notes that humans have been trying to find fairy gold in the large puff ball mushrooms that grow upon the cove ever since a man claimed that when the fairies sat on them, they released gold dust)
'Blackgang Gnomes', Old Village, Shanklin, Isle



of Wight

'Pixie Garden', Blackgang, Isle of Wight

'The Fairy Chapel' Heysham, Lancashire

'Fairyland', Broughton, Lancashire

'Fairy Glen', Appley Bridge, Wigan, Lancashire

'Tripp's Corner', West Didsbury, Manchester
(Trip, like Quick, is another very old fairy name; see *Nymphidia*)

'Fairy Lane', Salford, Manchester

'Fairy Falls', Donard, Newcastle

'The Witch's Row', Great Yarmouth, Norfolk.

'The Fairy Grotto', Gough's Caves, Cheddar, Somerset

'The Witch's Parlour/Kitchen', Wookey Hole Caves, Somerset

'Pook's Hill', Burwash, Sussex

'Puck Church Cliffs', Sussex

'The Goblin's Pool', Bucks Green, Sussex

'The Salisbury Giant and Hob-nob', Museum of Salisbury, Wiltshire

'Hob Hole', Castleton, Danby, Yorkshire (Danby is the setting for the fascinating account of *Forty Years in a Moorland Parish* (1891) by Reverend JC Atkinson, a deep-thinking clergyman who moved to an isolated village where belief in Pagan lore was rife)

'Fairy Dell', Buckden, Yorkshire

'The Fairy Glen', Peasholm Park, Scarborough, Yorkshire

'Boggle Hole', Youth Hostel, Robin Hood's Bay, Yorkshire (the hostel is long closed sadly but Boggle Hole is still on the map.)

'Fairyland' Helmsley, Ryedale, Yorkshire

'Fairy Glen', Goathland, Yorkshire (also the setting for ITV's *Heartbeat*!)

'Fairy Falls', Hutton-Le-Hole, Yorkshire (once known as 'The Fairies Cradle' Yorkshire; 'Hutton-Le-Hole' means 'Place of the burial ground near the hollow')

'Fairy Glen', Ilkley

Moor, Yorkshire (part of Rombolds Moor. On 1 December 1987, a retired policeman, Philip Spencer, saw and photographed a strange creature rushing up a hill top on the moor, which communicated by gesticulating with one of its 'arms' that he should go no further. Spencer identified the being as an alien, which then vanished into a spacecraft and took off at great speed)

'Fairy Glen', near Nunthorpe, Middlesbrough, Yorkshire

'Wizard's Glen', Mulgrave Woods, Whitby, Yorkshire

'Fairy Glen', Saltburn, Yorkshire

SCOTLAND

'Broddick from the road to the Fairy Glen', Isle of Arran

'Witches Road', Abernathy

'Bogle Burn Road', Scotland (postcard printed in Galashiels, but no longer exists)

'The Witches Cauldron', Dunbar, East Lothian

'The Fairies Castle', Cawdor Glen

'The Fairy Loup' Byre Burn, Gilnockie

'Morag's Fairy Glen', Dunoon

'Puck's Glen', Dunoon

'Ellwyn Fairy Dean', Galashiels (two for the price of one: the Elle Folk which is still in use in the Danish language are the earliest types of Elves. Indeed Elves were the first intermediate indeterminate denizens of Fairyland. With the advent of Christianity, they were rebranded as the faintly diabolical offspring of Adam & his first wife, Lilith)

'The Fairy Bridge', Largo, Fife

'The Fairy Dean', Melrose

'North Witch Rock', Port Patrick

'The Witches Pool', Ardgool, Loch Gailhead

'Fairy Glen', Rosemarkie

'Fairykirk Hill', Rosyth

'The Fairy Glen', Spinningdale, Dornoch

'The Fairy Islands', Loch Sween, Tayvallich

'The Fairy Knoll', North Uist

WALES

'Fairy Glen', Brynmawr

'Goblin Tower', Denbigh

'Road to the Fairy Glen', Penmaenmawr

'The Bridge of the Cauldron', Betws-y-Coed

'Fairy Glen', Betws-y-coed', Wales. (Probably the most famous fairy spot in Wales if not Great Britain, 'The Fairy Glen' has retained some of its enchantment especially if visited at off peak times. Due to its popularity, there are a vast amount of postcards in different styles, all showing the same scenes. The most intriguing are the ones in which an artist has attempted to draw fairy imagery on the scenery. The River Conwy still runs through the Glen and the area is still said to be fairy-haunted. The green-clad fay of the River Conwy were said to live seven years on the Earth, seven years in the air and seven years underground.)

'Fairyland', Ye Olde Tea Gardens, Menai Bridge

'Fairy Falls', Rock Park Llandrindod Wells

'Fairy Hill', Seaview, Swansea

IRELAND

'Fairy King & Queen', West Coast, Achill Island

'Fairy Bridge', Bundoran, Co. Donegal

'Loch Fee', Leenane, Connemara

'Lough Fea House', Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan

'Fairy Hill' (Tieveragh), Co. Antrim

'Home of Nial, King of the Fairies', Malin Head, Donegal, Co. Donegal

'Puck's Castle', Dublin

'Poul-a-Phouca', Dublin

'Fairy Glen', Co. Down

'The Phooka Stairs', Killarney, Co. Kerry

'Puck Fair' (still held every year), Killorglin, Co. Kerry

'Fairy Glen', Killarney, Co. Kerry

'The Bridge, Fairy Glen', Rostrevor, Co. Down

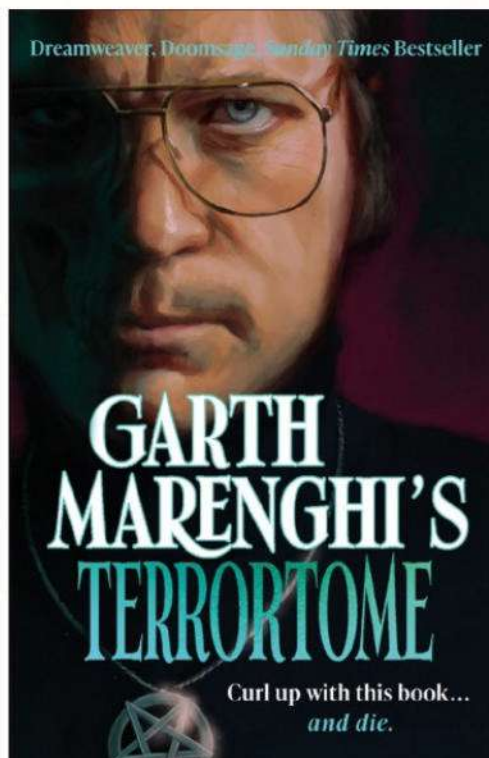
TOME SWEET TOME

The Dreamweaver is back. In *TerrorTome*, his first major work since the late 1980s, British horror legend Garth Marengi has produced a work of characteristically distressing fiction. With the novel now available in paperback, **BOB FISCHER** attempts an in-depth interview – but soon finds himself rather out of his depth...

In the world of horror fiction, there are few bigger names than Garth Marengi. It's got four syllables for a start. Stephen King? James Herbert? Clive Barker? Three syllables apiece. Poor Dean Koontz has only got two. But Garth Marengi trumps them all. And in *TerrorTome*, his first major work of fiction in over 30 years, he is equally victorious in the horror stakes. An anthology split into three connected sections, it follows the nerve-shredding (and frequently stomach-churning) trials of dashing supernatural fiction novelist Nick Steen, and the fragmented realities (and "Army of Boners" skeletal warriors) that arise from his unbridled sexual congress with a possessed typewriter.

Marengi's career has been chequered. In 2004, Channel 4 screened six episodes of his banned 1980s series *Garth Marengi's Darkplace*, with Marengi himself assuming the role of Dr Rick Dagless MD, a Vietnam veteran combating the forces of supernatural darkness in a Romford hospital. His last-known TV appearance, in 2006, was as a guest on his own publisher's short-lived TV chat show, *Man to Man with Dean Learner*. Since then? Nothing. So *TerrorTome's* success as a *Sunday Times* bestseller, and Marengi's subsequent string of sold-out live readings at venues across the UK, have arguably constituted the most unlikely literary comeback since Harper Lee. Who also only had three syllables in her name.

I was aware of Marengi's reputation as a prickly interviewee. Instructed to call him at exactly 2.37pm on a Wednesday, my nerves got the better of me. Prevaricating wildly, I made a cup of Maxwell House to bolster myself. And, as a result, inadvertently dialled his number a minute late, at 2.38pm. At 2.39pm, I was still waiting for Marengi to answer, and began to wonder if I had missed this vital window of opportunity. But then, following a crackle of sinister static, a familiar (if decidedly ill-tempered) voice emerged from the ether. What follows is a direct transcript of the phone conversation



"I RECALL TIPPING AN ENTIRE SHELF OF DENNIS WHEATLEY NOVELS ONTO THE FLOOR OF MY LOCAL WH SMITHS"

I enjoyed with Garth Marengi. Well, I say "enjoyed"...

Bob: How have the live appearances been going? Would you care to detail a good experience and a bad experience from life on the road?

Garth: Which question do you want me to answer first? You've asked two.

Bob: The first?

Garth: They've been going brilliantly.

Bob: And the second?

Garth: Which itself is formed of two parts, and is technically a question asking whether I care to answer it at all, which I don't. The whole thing should be rephrased.

Bob: OK, please detail a good experience and bad experience from life on the road.

Garth: Better. The good experience? My rider was generally observed. The bad experience? My rider was generally observed except for one particular venue, which we've now axed from future tours.

Bob: You seem to have been working on TerrorTome since the late 1980s. What took you so long? In the book's preface, you allude to "extraneous details" – what were they?

Garth: Again, two questions. I will answer your first. It took me so long because I was inconvenienced by editors. Next question.

Bob: The hero of TerrorTome is Nick Steen. He's a writer of horror fiction with a loathing of the publishing industry. Did you put much of yourself into Nick's character, or is he entirely fictitious?

Garth: Not entirely fictitious, no. As a writer of heroic fiction – your words, Bob – I know it's important to imbue my characters with my own heroic qualities. Yet it's important to keep something back in order to have enough in the creative bank for my next heroic character. So in *TerrorTome*, Nick Steen is six foot one. I'm six foot two.

Bob: Part One of *TerrorTome* is subtitled 'Type-Face' and it begins with...

Garth: (Interrupting) That's *Tome* One, and it's 'Type-Face, Dark Lord of the Prolix'.

Bob: OK... Tome One of *TerrorTome*, 'Type-Face, Dark Lord of the Prolix', begins with Nick enjoying a torrid affair with a supernatural typewriter. Have you ever experienced romantic – or even physical – feelings for an inanimate object?

Garth: Many. My numerous cars, several pens, my typewriters, obviously. Leather sofas, a Mr Frosty slush maker Pam gave me when we were courting, fingerless gloves, chapsticks, industrial bubblewrap. I could go on.

Bob: That's probably enough. 'Type-Face, Dark Lord of the Prolix' also features an older writer of supernatural fiction called Algernon Tench, who reminded me a little of MR James or even Arthur Machen. Was this intentional? How do you feel about this gentler school of early 20th century horror?

Garth: Well, Bob "Two Questions" Fischer, it was indeed intentional and partly an apology for my own early indiscretions as a youthful horror writer, fresh off the block and hungry for success. I can distinctly recall, when my first book was published, tipping an entire shelf of Dennis Wheatley novels onto the floor of my local WHSmiths. Even though I was chastised for that act, which I blamed entirely on Pam's pregnancy in order to avoid paying for damages, the whole batch was soiled and ended up in an outside bargain bin. In many ways, *TerrorTome* is my half-arsed apology for that.

Bob: Tome Two, 'Bride of Bone', is based heavily around a medical condition called avascular necrosis. It's essentially a loss of blood supply to the bones, and it's a condition that – left untreated – can result in the bone structure collapsing completely. You seem to know a lot about this condition. Do you know someone who has actually suffered from it? Or is that knowledge simply down to good research?

Garth: Both. My wife Pam suffered from it badly in her twenties, though I'd never tell that to anybody as she swore me to secrecy. But as part of the recovery programme, we ordered in numerous pamphlets and obscure medical texts which, when her toe eventually dropped off regardless, were rendered useless. Or so I thought...



Bob: Medical professionals occur frequently in your stories. Including, of course, the famous Dr Rick Dagless MD. Before you became the Dreamweaver, did you ever consider a career in medicine?

Garth: No, although I did consider joining Special Branch, which is much the same thing nowadays. I guess in life all of us meet a lot of doctors. I think if you counted up how many doctors feature in my books, and compared it to how many doctors one meets in one's life, the two would pretty much be the same. Or vastly different.

Bob: There's also a cameo for a skeletal Rick Wakeman in this story, still playing his iconic Moog synthesizer...

Garth: (Laughs) Ha ha... good old Rick...

Bob: I'm assuming you're a fan of his work?

Garth: No.

Bob: Are you a friend of his?

Garth: Not any more.

Bob: Is he aware of his appearance in the book?

Garth: Overly aware. Let's say that.

Bob: I wondered whether Bruford the Psychic Dugong, also featured in Tome Two, was named after Rick's one-time Yes bandmate, Bill Bruford.

Garth: Absolutely not. In any way.

Bob: Tome Three, 'The Dark Fractions' features multiple, split-personality versions of Nick Steen. Can you give examples of the multiple personalities that Garth Marenghi might have?

Garth: Can, but won't.

Bob: Oh, come on. Who would be the darkest of Garth's dark fractions?

Garth: Carry on like that and you'll find out.

Bob: OK, I'm sorry. (A long and awkward pause follows, and Marenghi can be heard breathing heavily) Moving on, then... it's subtle, but there are elements of the book that could be seen as a satire on your own difficulties with both editors and publishers. Is that fair? Or am I reading too much into it?

Garth: You're not reading *enough* into it. The message is explicit throughout *TerrorTome*. My editors and publishers were wrong throughout. As I told them on numerous occasions, you can threaten me, intimidate me all you like, but you'll sew up neither my mouth nor my mind. My unexpurgated "horrotica" section is there for all to see, despite numerous attempts to excise it, along with various "censored" scenes of extreme body horror, preserved for all time at the back of the book in what was, until the eleventh hour, an adults-only "sealed" section.

Bob: Are you working on your next book already, or is it likely to take you another 30 years?

Garth: I *was* working on it, Bob, until you interrupted me with these endless questions. It is called *Incarcerat* and it will be out at Hallowe'en. Meanwhile, the *TerrorTome* paperback is out now. Put that in your pipe and print it.

Bob: I will.

Garth: The interview's over, Bob.

Bob: I know.

(Phone clicks)

Garth Marenghi's *TerrorTome* is out now in paperback from Hodder & Stoughton.

Heartfelt thanks to Matthew Holness, another writer with four syllables in his name. Could this be significant? It's probably best not to ask.

REVISITING ARTHUR C CLARKE'S WORLD OF STRANGE POWERS **PART 2**

In 1985, Arthur C Clarke was back in our living rooms with a follow-up to his *Mysterious World* series, this time focusing on such wild talents as premonitions, telepathy and stigmata. **RYAN SHIRLOW** continues his reassessment of a forteen TV classic.

Welcome to the second part of our journey through *Arthur C Clarke's World of Strange Powers*, and to our ongoing reappraisal of the acclaimed author's TV output of the 1980s. By the power of digital technology, Clarke reappears as our host, and takes us back on a tour of his case files, introducing the mysteries which would inspire many a young viewer to become a lifelong forteen.

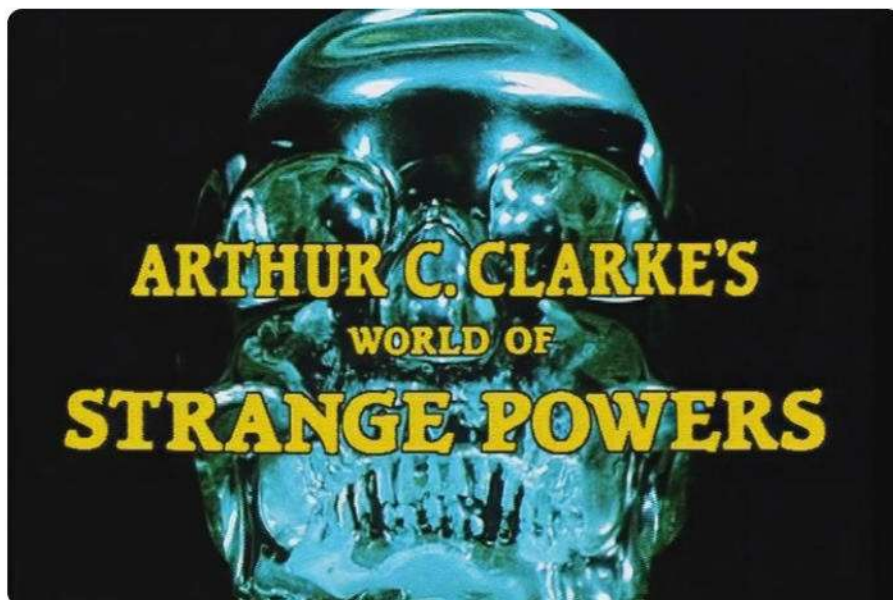
So far, we've seen poltergeists, psychics and lurid stigmatics as the series continues to focus on the human capacity to experience the inexplicable. This month, we tackle a few episodes dealing, in their different ways, with what awaits us beyond the grave. But lest the mood grow too grim, we have plenty of larger-than-life characters to lift the gloom, and a smattering of dancing fairies too.

EPISODE 5: GHOSTS, APPARITIONS AND HAUNTED HOUSES

Clarke begins with the tale of a spectral Dutch lady, floating silently along the battlements of the 17th century fortifications at Galle, in his adopted home of Sri Lanka. Everyone loves a good ghost story, Clarke reminds us, and one in 10 Britons claims to have encountered a ghost.¹

But first we join the 'serious' American ghost hunters on the Chicago Supernatural Tour, led by local raconteur Richard T Crow. He introduces us to Resurrection Mary, whose spirit danced with former funeral director Gerry Paulus and dematerialised on return to the cemetery.²

The tour continues to take in gangster Al Capone's grave at Mount Carmel, where we hear how in life he was tormented by the spectre of his rival, James Clark. The programme doesn't make the obvious connection to Capone's slide into syphilis-induced insanity.³ Nearby, the incorruptible body of Julia Buccola, the



THREE CASES HIGHLIGHT THE NEGATIVE IMPACT PARANORMAL EXPERIENCES CAN HAVE ON WITNESSES

'Italian Bride', treats the tourists to the miraculous smell of roses.

Throughout, the laconic Crow keeps the momentum rolling; he suggests any disappointed punters return to improve the tour by sharing their own hauntings, if they think they can do better.

Back in the UK, we visit the Treasurer's House in York, where in 1953 plumber Harry Martindale witnessed the top half of a Roman column marching through the basement, cut off at the knees by the original level of the Roman road (see FT364:18-20, 365:16-18). Harry died in 2014 without ever recanting his story.⁴ Clarke uses this example to introduce the pseudo-scientific 'Stone Tape' theory: that images or sounds can be captured or recorded by the environment and played back at a later date.⁵ He cites American engineer Richard Woodbridge, who claims to have reproduced mechanical noises impressed into the grooves of pottery, just like a vinyl record. Doubtless running the needle over any rough surface could create similar acoustic effects.

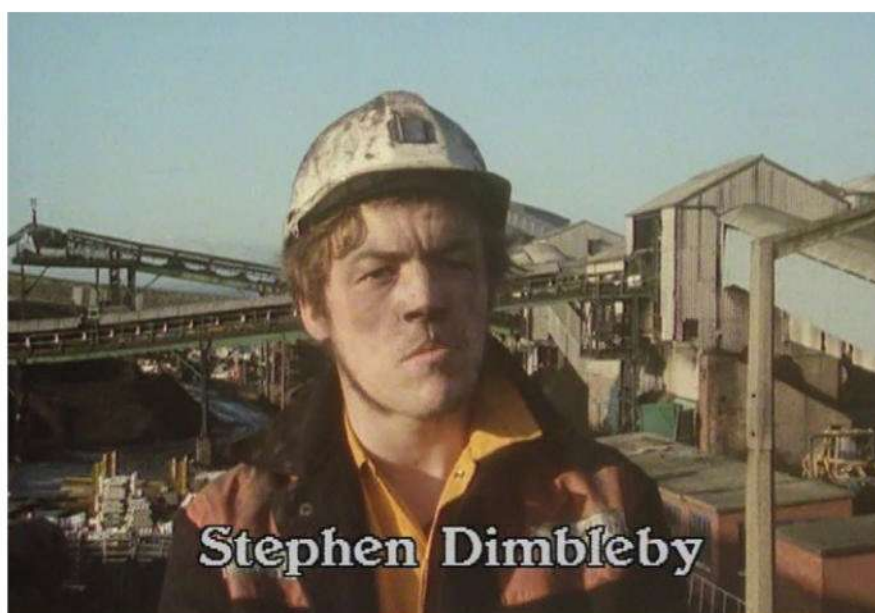
We spend quite some time on two cases Clarke believes solved: an hallucination of a sinister motorcyclist in Wisconsin is attributed to chemical fumes trapped inside Vicki Branden's car, and strange animal noises at the site of the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus memorial are traced to a real-life zoo by John Candy lookalike Sgt O'Rourke.⁶

Three cases from England highlight the sometimes negative impact paranormal experiences can have upon witnesses. At Silverwood Colliery, miner Stephen Dimbleby takes a substantial pay cut to avoid returning underground, where a faceless revenant awaits him in the subterranean gloom. Was this a prank that got out of hand, with the culprit unwilling to confess once a petrified Stephen ended up in hospital? Or was an unpopular member of the team successfully relegated to other duties?

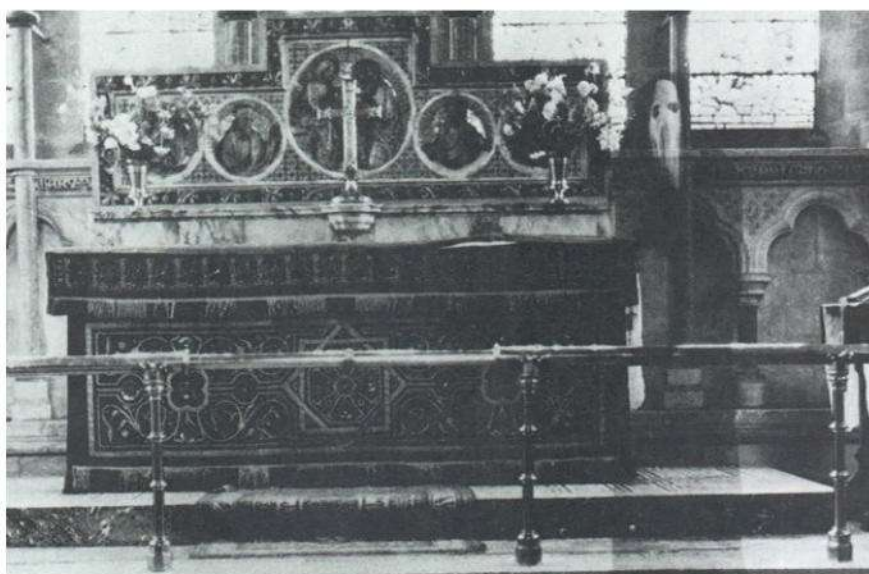
Bedfordshire carpet fitter Roy Fulton is left severely rattled after picking up a classic phantom hitchhiker: the silent figure of a young man vanished from the passenger seat of his van. "Someone got in that motor," he tells us, "and I do not know to this day what it was."

And in Grimsby, a hooded monk forces Sharon Grenny and her child out of their council house. She describes the lights going out (ah, the 1980s nostalgia), before the figure strolled in, presenting very much like a tangible physical intruder.

Clarke concludes with his own rather



FACING PAGE: Harry Martindale takes tourists beneath the Treasurer's House in York; the Roman column he witnessed in 1953 was not marching that day. **TOP & CENTRE:** A transatlantic comparison: US Police Sergeant John O'Rourke bravely confronts the supernatural, while British miner Stephen Dimbleby (centre) quits his job to avoid the terrors of the pit. **ABOVE:** A Ted Serios thoughtograph.



WE WATCH AS SERIOS SUCCEEDS ONLY IN CAPTURING SELFIES OF HIS GURNING FACE

unnecessary theory that the brain can send images down the optic nerve to the eye so that it operates like some kind of TV screen. But with a cheeky grin he asks: “Do we really want to know the mundane truth?”

EPISODE 6: FAIRIES, PHANTOMS AND FANTASTIC PHOTOGRAPHS

In the 1960's, Ted Serios (**FT256:52-55**) found fame by claiming he could imprint images directly onto film via the art of ‘thoughtography’. His method involved downing copious amounts of alcohol, donning a tight black polo-neck sweater, and then shouting and leaping about, a spectacle very much in sympathy with the period's beat music and performance art. He was championed at the time by psychiatrist Dr. Jule Eisenbud. The pair are reunited here, 20 years later, for another test on Clarke's show.

Much is made of odd glitches in the imagery, which somehow demonstrate they must be dream-like projections from the Serios psyche. According to Eisenbud, his subject was continually observed by dozens of people in his heyday. But Serios relied on a tube of paper he would hold in front of the lens: his “gizmo”, which helped “concentrate his thoughts”. One witness believes Serios simply concealed a slide inside the gizmo, easily disposing of the evidence in the overall chaos. Writing in 2003, infamous celebrity debunker James Randi (obit **FT401:28-30**) claimed to have replicated the same technique live on TV in front of Serios and Eisenbud.⁷ More from him later.

We watch as Serios, throwing his thoughts to camera, succeeds only in capturing selfies of his gurning face. The two friends work on into the night to recapture their lost powers/youth, drinking heavily, presumably on the production team's budget. It's such a strange, psychedelic grift, that it's hard to begrudge them it.

An abrupt change of gear and another hop across the Atlantic, this time to cousins Francis and Elsie and the Cottingley fairies (**FT53:48-53, 356:30-35**). We are treated to a potted history of the famous photographs the girls took of the little dancing figures at the beck behind their house, and their sincere endorsement by *Sherlock Holmes* author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

We learn that the case was cracked back in 1982 when a negative of the first photograph, held in the Brotherton Library at Leeds University, was analysed by photography expert Geoffrey Crawley. He found

TOP: Ted Serios in his 1960s heyday. **CENTRE:** Tim Newton and Dr Steve Gull use advanced Home Office equipment to debunk some famous photographs. **ABOVE:** But they can find no obvious solution for this iconic shot taken by the Reverend Kenneth Lord.

it physically could not have been produced using the primitive camera the girls had at the time. Subsequently, he discovered the true original negative and the evidence of retouching that had been done by Conan Doyle's associate Edward Gardner. Both versions of the photograph are presented in the show for comparison.⁸

Frances and Elsie eventually confessed to faking the photographs using handmade figures balanced on hatpins. They felt no shame, as the endeavour was meant only in fun and not as a malicious hoax. Besides, the fairies had been real! Frances sticks to her story here, but admits that the little people of the beck are long gone by now. Clarke reminds us that claims by sweet innocent children should be treated as cautiously as those by adults.

We conclude at a Home Office laboratory, back in the day when the UK might still reasonably claim that such a facility possessed the "world's most advanced equipment for the examination of photographs". Tim Newton and Dr Steve Gull use this technological advantage to analyse a number of familiar photographs of ghosts.

An indistinct figure kneeling in a church is revealed as a caretaker using a dustpan to clean the altar. A double exposure explains the mysterious reappearance of Mabel Chinery's deceased mother in the back seat of her husband's car (tellingly she had *not* been visible when the picture was taken). And the figure of another woman is identified lighting church candles by some particularly clever analysis tracing the streaks of light as she ascends the steps.

But our experts struggle to find a simple solution for Reverend Kenneth Lord's infamous shot of a floating Scream mask taken in a church in Newby, Yorkshire.⁹ Its reputation intact, it thereby earns a prominent place on the DVD cover.

EPISODE 7: HAVE WE LIVED BEFORE?

Clarke's Sri Lankan retreat proves an ideal location to investigate the phenomenon of reincarnation, freed from our cosy Western preconceptions. In large parts of the Hindu and Buddhist world, our past lives are not considered a controversial or mysterious topic. Clarke, speaking in the newspaper offices of the *Sri Lankan Sun*, notes that they regularly cover stories of reincarnated children, describing their previous lives in great detail.

In Unawatuna, two girls claim to be rebel friends Johnny and Robert, dramatically executed in the "brief but bloody" insurrection of 1971. Meanwhile, in Pethiyagoda, monks match little Anoka Sriyani with a child killed in a motorcycle accident in a neighbouring village (although they can hardly be seen as dispassionate investigators.)

'Reunited' with her original family, Anoka recognises the house, her previous mother, old toys, and even the pet dog. She still visits frequently. It's entirely understandable that the bereaved parents



TOP: A double exposure is the explanation for the appearance of Mabel Chinery's deceased mother in the back seat of her husband's car. **CENTRE:** Anoka Sriyani visits the Buddhist temple with her mother. **ABOVE:** Did she, like the Pollock twins, die tragically young in a previous life?



TOP AND CENTRE: Ray Bryant searches for his own grave. Was he a rifleman in the Crimean War?
 ABOVE: "Come as you were" at a Los Angeles reincarnation party.

found the solace they did in the stories of the monks and the appearance of this mysterious child.

On to Hexham in Northumberland, where John Pollock's daughters Jacqueline and Joanna are hit and killed by a car on the way to church. Unlike in Sri Lanka, Mr Pollock's belief that his wife would return the children to this Earth was not likely to receive much community support; but Mrs Pollock did give birth to two new girls, one of whom allegedly had a scar and birthmark matching those of her 'former self'.

The twins were given the dead girl's dolls. They gave them the same names and remembered various landmarks around Hexham whenever they visited. It is hard not to suspect that the father, deluded in his grief, prompted and coached the children in the details of their departed sister's lives. But it is equally hard not to forgive him.

Ray Bryant thinks that he has lived before, as Colour Sergeant Ruben Stafford, veteran of the Crimean War. Was this a vivid fantasy, created under Bryant's experience of regression hypnosis? Remarkably, Stafford checks out as a real person and Bryant accurately describes several details of his life. In a trance, he correctly names many people in his chain of command, but gets some others wrong. He gets the details of his service rifle all mixed up, but accurately describes a captured Russian drum. To his credit, Bryant seems open to considering a variety of options other than simple reincarnation: he asks if he might somehow have inherited the memories or received them via telepathy.

Clarke digs deeper into the controversial practice of regression. He believes the subjects are regurgitating unconsciously held information, experiencing a form of what he calls cryptomnesia.¹⁰ He gives a confirmed example from Finland: a woman who believed she was a mediæval innkeeper's daughter and who could sing in English, a language she did not speak in waking life. However, when challenged under further hypnosis, this particular subject admitted that she had glanced briefly at the song in a book in the library.¹¹

All this raises questions about how much information the human mind takes in subconsciously and can later recall. In fact, Clarke considers this ability almost as amazing as the possibility of reincarnation itself.

As is often the case, we conclude in a slightly condescending fashion with some light relief from our wacky cousins across The Pond. The spectacle of a Los Angeles "Reincarnation Party", with participants in various states of period *undress*, reminds me of the Meryl Streep and Goldie Hawn movie *Death Becomes Her*.¹² We also get to enjoy two reincarnated Civil War veterans cheerfully denouncing each

RAY BRYANT THINKS HE HAS LIVED BEFORE AS COLOUR SERGEANT RUBEN STAFFORD

other as Yankee and Confederate scum. Others describe the experience as giving them a sense of meaning lacking in their traditional upbringing, and who are we to complain about that?

EPISODE 8: AN ELEMENT OF THE DIVINE

After exploring the mysteries of what lies beyond the veil of mortality, it is hard not to feel a little snobbish about dowsing – fortuneana’s dowdy cousin – but let’s see what Clarke makes of it. He starts by describing the water diviners that ply their trade in the drier parts of Sri Lanka, passed over by the monsoon rains. The rain has, however, arrived on cue for his piece to camera.

Anna Ford takes us to Illinois, to meet professional oil ‘witcher’ Clayton McDowell, who cruises the dusty roads in his outsize Cadillac. Dowsing works for everybody, he reckons, “unless they’re dead”. His success amazes the experts, and he saves the impoverished county high school from financial ruin – it’s still going strong today.¹³

On to West Germany, and the HQ of the British Army of the Rhine. Colonel Harry Grattan expresses his distaste for the local water companies, and the stuffy German geologists, having dowsed his own cheaper and superior supply for the base himself. He ascribes his success to the “element of the divine” and trots out the old *Hamlet* line: “There are more things in Heaven and Earth Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

In Danville, Vermont, dowsing is on the school curriculum. Every year the town holds a festival to celebrate and promote the art (and attract tourists). We watch the attendees measure their personal auras, wandering around the green with sticks outstretched, accompanied by the music of Alan Hawkshaw in electro-hillbilly mode.¹⁴ The local enthusiasts describe their personal experiences, from dowsing to select groceries in the general store to diagnosing equine arthritis.

T-shirts proclaiming “Dowsing is Divine” are on sale; a play on words, and perhaps a smart one to placate any local evangelicals.¹⁵

According to the Danville Chamber of Commerce, the town still hosts the headquarters of the American Association of Dowsters, and their bookstore, although their annual convention seems to have drifted off elsewhere.¹⁶

Dowsing is an ancient art, Ford reassures us, taking us back to the 16th century and the German *Wünschelrootengangers*



TOP: Clarke, literally in his element, presenting to camera in a Sri Lankan monsoon. CENTRE Colonel Harry Grattan used dowsing to secure a ‘sovereign’ water supply for the British Army at Rheindahlen. ABOVE: Oil witching rewards Clayton McDowell with a Cadillac-shaped piece of the American Dream.



TOP: Teaching children in Vermont. CENTRE: 16th century *Wünschelrootengangers*. ABOVE: Dowsing was among the unusual tactics trialled by the US military against the Viet Cong. FACING PAGE: Arthur C Clarke looking extremely cheerful now he's only got another five episodes to go.

or “wishing rod walkers” who used the technique in their quest for valuable underground minerals. She cites other historical precedents, including dowsing’s role in pharmaceuticals manufacture and archaeology.

Further credibility is sought from the US Marine Corps, who conducted experiments with dowsing during the Vietnam War; but given the other wackiness they infamously indulged in, is this quite the ringing endorsement the programme intends? ¹⁷

We return to James Randi – and his efforts to discredit dowisers in the Australian Outback. The test subjects struggle to detect metal nuggets hidden within sealed boxes, but score significantly above chance at finding flowing water. Clarke disagrees with Randi’s dismissive conclusions, and highlights the water results were at 100:1 odds against chance.

An attempt is made to tie this all up with vague theories about the Earth’s magnetic field. Researchers at Utah State University claim the dowsing rods twitch because tiny voltages are subconsciously picked up by the dowser’s hands. Again, the statistics are well above what chance might lead us to expect.

Lest this all become too convincing, some hapless telephone engineers take us dowsing for line faults, accompanied by synthetic ‘sad trombone’ noises as it all goes horribly wrong. “High technology help” arrives the next day and completes the job in minutes.

Clarke highlights how dowisers, like racing tipsters, probably remember their successes and forget their failures, but he holds a candle for the detection of water as some kind of innate survival skill. Fort’s ideas on teleportation went so far as to suggest we can actually attract water. ¹⁸

Where do we stand today? Science author Michael Brooks had a go at dowsing back in 2009. Like the researchers in Utah, he cites the ideomotor effect: that minute subconscious twitches cause the rods to move, in his case because he wanted to successfully complete his apprentice dowsing course. ¹⁹ In 2017 the *Guardian* newspaper complained about the ongoing use of dowisers by British water companies; their article linked to detailed studies, including a seemingly definitive (negative) analysis of trials conducted in Germany. ²⁰

In contrast, the *BBC Science Focus* magazine accepts that some dowisers are successful, but attributes their hits to subliminal cues from the environment (ie. vegetation, geology, temperature). ²¹ I suspect this would be Clarke’s favourite explanation, it’s certainly mine, but as ever I welcome healthy challenge via the letters page.

Next time, we conclude our journey through the final five episodes, which feature Clarke’s wrap-up of the series and his personal conclusions.

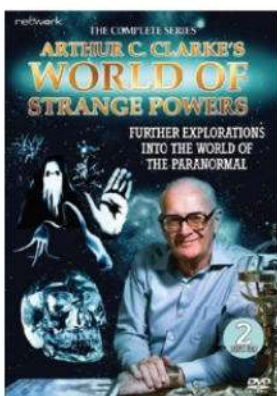
Will we agree? Join us in the next issue to find out.



If you want to join in, I'd recommend buying the excellent 2015 Network DVD collection, which offers by far the best way to view all 13 episodes of this classic series. Available at: <https://networkonair.com>

NOTES

- 1 This figure varies widely in contemporary surveys, inevitably depending on how the question is asked. Do you believe in ghosts, or did you actually see one yourself? In 2019 a similar proportion of respondents indicated that they had communicated in some way with the dead: <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/philosophy/survey-results/daily/2019/10/09/07a75/3>.
- 2 For more on Mary, see: www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1985-10-31-8503140599-story.html and www.memoriesoftheprairie.com/blog/2018/8/31/chicagos-most-infamous-ghost
- 3 <https://historycollection.com/infamous-gangster-believed-haunted-ghost-one-victims/3/>
- 4 www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/11559578.famous-ghost-witness-harry-martindale-dies/
- 5 From the acclaimed 1972 television play of the same name written by Nigel Kneale..
- 6 The circus train was derailed and many performers lost their lives; narrator Anna Ford does not skip a beat as she tells us professional fat man Edward Karr needed two plots in the graveyard.



- 7 <http://archive.randi.org/site/jr/091903.html>
- 8 Many of the artefacts, including the original cameras, are now held by the excellent National Science and Media Museum in Bradford: www.scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk/about-us/press-office/museum-acquires-final-camera-cottingley-fairies-story. It's well worth a visit

- 9 Reminiscent of both the Edvard Munch original and the 1990s movie, currently being rebooted
- 10 Defined by the American Psychological Association as "an implicit memory phenomenon in which people mistakenly believe that a current thought or idea is a product of their own creation when, in fact, they have encountered it previously and then forgotten it." <https://dictionary.apa.org/cryptomnesia>
- 11 For more on the dangers of this practice in the context of 'recovered' versus 'false' memories of sexual or ritual abuse see: www.independent.co.uk/life-style/the-dangers-of-memory-can-regression-therapy-by-hypnosis-produce-false-recollections-of-sexual-abuse-hester-lacey-reports-5431250.html, or Jim Schnabel's 'Memories of Hell' (FT11-23-32), which ranks among the all-time most disturbing articles ever printed in *Fortean Times*.

- 12 www.imdb.com/title/tt0104070/
- 13 <https://edwardscountyhs.ss20.sharpschool.com/>

- 14 For all the synthetic and atmospheric gloom he brings to this show, recall that Hawkshaw also composed the somewhat less harrowing *Grange Hill* and *Countdown* themes
- 15 For a quick summary of Biblical objections see: www.gotquestions.org/Bible-dowsing.html.

- 16 www.danvillevtchamber.org/attractions-activities-danville-vermont/
- 17 For a taster of interesting US military 'psyops' in the region see for example: <https://science.howstuffworks.com/ghost-tape-no-10-haunted-mixtape-the-vietnam-war.htm> and <https://charliecompany.org/2018/08/31/ace-of-spades/>. For the wider US military obsession with all things New Age, see *The Men Who Stare at Goats* (2004) by Jon Ronson. And not to be left out, the Soviets did their own work on dowsing too: <http://www.dowsing-research.net/dowsing/articles/Williamson%20-%20article%20-%20Dowsing%20achieves%20new%20credence.pdf>.

- 18 See for example *Wild Talents*, p.973 in *Complete Books*.
- 19 www.newscientist.com/article/dn17532-why-dowsing-makes-perfect-sense/
- 20 www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/nov/22/water-divining-bunk-popular-myths-science-sally-le-page
- 21 www.sciencefocus.com/science/is-there-any-scientific-evidence-for-dowsing/

➡ **RYAN SHIRLOW** is a Northern Irish fortean, writer and musician. His album *Ullstair University - Vol.1* is available on Woodford Halse via bandcamp.com

SUBSCRIBE TODAY AND GET 3 MONTHS OF **Viz** FOR JUST £3

PLUS A FREE LIFE OF CHRIST IN CATS TEA TOWEL!

SAVE 11%
ON COVER PRICE

FREE GIFTS
for
SUBSCRIBERS!

**WE HATE
GOING IN
SHOPS!**

**DOWN WITH
LEAVING THE
HOUSE**

Very few discerning people
will ever own this *Life of
Christ in Cats* Tea Towel



THE life story of Jesus, gloriously captured in comic form by the irreverent and hilarious *Viz* team. This limited edition tea towel features the entire *Life of Christ in Cats* comic strip, a must-have for any *Viz* fan. It's a brilliant piece of art, a hilarious piece of comedy, and a brilliant piece of tea towel.

He died for all our sins. Now let him "dry" for all our sins.



**RECEIVE YOUR FIRST
3 MONTHS FOR £3**

If you find you simply can't live without your fix of adult humour, your subscription means you pay **as little as £2.83 per issue**, instead of £3.95 in the shops.

You'll also receive a **FREE Viz** tea towel!

ORDER ONLINE TODAY AT
<https://shop.viz.co.uk/vizpxft>
OR CALL 020 8752 8195
OR EMAIL hello@metropolis.co.uk
QUOTING THE OFFER CODE VIZPXFT



The offer will automatically revert to a 6-month direct debit which will auto renew. If you wish to cancel the direct debit offer, please contact us via phone or email. You will be able to view your subscription online at shop.viz.co.uk/login



Something to crow about

ROB GANDY explores the origins of a bizarre dance and its contemporary revival as performed by the Moulton Crows.

Every July a group of 16 men get into something of a flap in the mid-Cheshire village of Moulton. This is because, dressed as crows in black outfits with bright yellow beaks, they perform a dance routine that dates back to the 1920s. They are the Moulton Crows, and their dance is the centrepiece of, and unique to, the annual Crow Fair.

So what does the Crow Dance involve? It has the 16 crows imitating the swooping and diving of the birds, as well as flapping their wings to a tune from an accordion player. At the centre is a scarecrow, which the crows dance around as if scavenging in a newly ploughed field. Frustrated that his scarecrow is not doing its job properly, a farmer enters and shoots at the crows, 'killing' some of them. A representation of the departing spirits of the dead crows is effected by the scarecrow releasing some doves or a figure dressed as a white crow leaving the field. The crows return to feed before the dance ends with them trooping off the field, followed by the scarecrow, which has come to life! (Yes, it was someone dressed up all the time and any live birds were hidden in its costume!)

After the performance the dancers collect donations for local charities, their beaks sometimes doubling up as handy receptacles for this purpose. In addition to the dance, a host of other activities, events, stalls, music and entertainments make the Crow Fair a real family event, with a miscellany of scarecrows decorating the village and its surroundings.

But how did the Crow Dance



The original dance was known as 'The Relic of the Cornfields'

come about in the first place? The main source of employment for Moulton villagers prior to the 1920s was salt mining, an industry that lined the banks of the River Weaver from Newbridge to Winsford. When the Depression hit, the redundant workers were forced to scavenge off coal slag heaps, which resulted in them being 'as black as crows' from the soot and dust, and the nickname stuck. There was no welfare state in those days and therefore the unemployed men decided to form an all-male dance troupe to compete in lucrative dance competitions at local fêtes. They decided to use their nickname and developed the dance outlined above. It is understood that the original dance was choreographed by a former dancing teacher and was known as 'The Relic of the Cornfields'. Possibly, it was adapted from an earlier tradition.

The Moulton Crows were very successful, winning many competitions and returning to the

village with trophies and cash, which was shared around so that everyone was looked after. This was a cause for great community pride and the Crows became a popular sight at carnivals and fetes across Cheshire. Unfortunately, they became the victims of their own success as they were eventually banned from the dance competitions and asked to take 'appearance money' instead, to give other troupes a chance of winning. Maintaining anonymity was important to the dancers (a tradition continued today to "add to the mystery and fun") given that performing in competitions was a means of raising funds; indeed, in the 1930s any such extra income could jeopardise their receipt of the newly introduced unemployment benefit.

In the 1970s interest in dancing competitions was fading; by the 1980s they had largely ceased and the Moulton Crows were no more. Nevertheless, many villagers remembered the dance with pride and fondness, and through popular local demand the Crow Dance was resurrected in 2006 by 16 local men from the village. They managed to get to speak to some of the surviving members of the Crows about the dance (there were no videos) and brought in a dance

LEFT: The Moulton Crows doing their thing at the 2017 Crow Fair.

teacher who choreographed the current version based on these recollections.

As described above, the Crow Dance is now a regular and popular feature of village life and its annual Crow Fair. Added publicity was gained when it featured in BBC Two's *Celebrity Antiques Road Trip* on in November 2021, which saw actor Neil Morrissey, presenter JJ Chalmers and antiques expert Izzie Balmer meet 'Crow Man 12' (in costume!) in *The Lion* pub. After telling the story behind the Crows, he invites JJ to participate in a dance rehearsal. JJ readily agrees and becomes 'Crow Man 17'. Suitably attired in black outfit and yellow beak (but with an 'L' plate around his neck) he goes through the routine with the rest of the troupe. All good fun!

The Covid-19 pandemic saw the dances cancelled for two years. 2021 saw its return at a smaller, manageable event that August, raising money for the village church and future events, and the July 2022 event was a roaring success. The dance's future looks assured, as children of Moulton School now perform as 'mini crows' at the Fair.

Moulton Crow Fair takes place on the second Saturday in July, and the next one is scheduled for 8 July 2023.

For more information, see <https://calendarcustoms.com/articles/moulton-crow-fair/> and www.facebook.com/moultonevents/

Videos of the modern incarnation of the Crow Dance are available online at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-XzsEtfdBM and www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7fIEt0FOHM

➔ **ROB GANDY** is a Visiting Professor at Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University. He is a lifelong forteran and a regular contributor to FT.

Chatting to Charles FORTRAN

RYAN SHIRLOW attempts to interview an artificial intelligence Chatbot about fortean mysteries, but comes up against an oddly unbending mindset

This month, we're delighted to bring you a wide-ranging discussion on all things fortean with the world's first, all-knowing, genuine super-intelligence: the AI Chatbot GPT4. I'll be asking it to delve into its vast array of sinister servers around the globe to answer some of those critical questions that FT readers have wrestled with for decades.

GPT4 has had a number of 'improvements' on previous models, designed to prevent it senselessly regurgitating everything it has digested from the Internet (unlike your parents), but has this also instilled a certain overly sceptical mindset? Let's find out. The responses below have been only lightly edited for brevity and spelling.

RS: *OK. Let's get straight down to brass tacks. Where are Elvis, Lord Lucan and the missing Manic Street Preachers guitarist Richey Edwards?*

GPT4: As an AI language model, I don't have access to any classified or insider information regarding the whereabouts of Elvis Presley, Lord Lucan, or Richey Edwards. These are all unresolved mysteries that have generated much speculation over the years, but there is no definitive evidence to confirm what happened to them. The official story is that Elvis Presley died in 1977, Lord Lucan disappeared in 1974 after being suspected of murder, and Richey Edwards went missing in 1995, and is presumed to have taken his own life. However,



“There is no credible evidence to support these claims”

the circumstances surrounding their disappearances continue to intrigue and fascinate people, and many theories and rumours continue to circulate.

But you must be particularly intrigued by the legends surrounding Elvis?

I do not have emotions, but I can say that the story of Elvis Presley is certainly fascinating and has captured the imagination of people around the world... his untimely death at the age of 42 has led to

numerous conspiracy theories and rumours that he faked his own death and is still alive today. However, there is no concrete evidence to support these claims, and the official cause of his death was ruled as a heart attack.

Could they be hiding out in Area 51?

There is no credible evidence to suggest that Elvis Presley, Lord Lucan, or Richey Edwards are hiding out in Area 51. Area 51 is a highly secretive United States Air Force facility located in the Nevada desert, which has been the subject of much speculation and conspiracy theories over the years. However, it is widely believed that the facility is primarily used for the development and testing of advanced military

technologies and aircraft. While there have been many claims of UFO sightings and government cover-ups surrounding Area 51, there is no credible evidence to support these claims.

Now we're talking. Perhaps they only stayed there long enough for a UFO to pick them up?

There is no credible evidence to support claims that Elvis Presley, Lord Lucan, or Richey Edwards were abducted by UFOs or any other supernatural or extraterrestrial forces. The official explanations for their disappearances are the most widely accepted, and until new evidence emerges, any claims to the contrary must be regarded as speculation and rumour.

You seem to have quite the issue with speculation and rumour.



As an AI language model, my goal is to provide accurate and reliable information based on credible sources. While speculation and rumours can be entertaining, they can also be misleading and potentially harmful. It's important to approach any information or claim with a critical and discerning eye, and to rely on credible sources and evidence when forming opinions or making decisions.

This is especially true when it comes to unresolved mysteries or conspiracy theories, which often lack concrete evidence and can be based on misinformation or misinterpretation. Therefore, my responses are based on the best available information and evidence at the time of my response.

Spoken like a true sceptic... but are you familiar with the works of Charles Fort?

Yes. He was an American writer and researcher who became well known for his extensive collections of reports and anecdotes of anomalous phenomena, such as UFO sightings, unexplained disappearances, and other unexplained events.

Fort is considered a pioneer of the study of anomalous phenomena, and his books, including *The Book of the Damned* and *New Lands*, continue to influence and inspire researchers and enthusiasts today. While Fort's approach to research and his theories have been criticised for being unscientific and lacking in rigour, his work has undoubtedly contributed to the ongoing interest and study of anomalous phenomena and unexplained mysteries.

Having absorbed his writing, surely you have absorbed some element of his famous open-mindedness?

As an AI language model, I don't have personal beliefs or opinions, and I do not have the capacity for open-mindedness or scepticism in

the traditional sense. However, I am programmed to provide accurate and informative responses to questions based on available information and credible sources. When it comes to unresolved mysteries and anomalous phenomena, my goal is to present the available evidence and theories in a balanced and objective manner. This involves presenting multiple perspectives and acknowledging the limitations of our current knowledge and understanding.

While I don't have the capacity for open-mindedness in the same way as a human, I strive to present information in a way that encourages critical thinking and consideration of multiple viewpoints.

Ah, so you have read Fortean Times?

Yes, I am familiar with *Fortean Times*. It is a magazine that covers a wide range of topics related to anomalous phenomena, including UFOs, cryptozoology, conspiracy theories, and other unexplained mysteries. The magazine is named after Charles Fort and is known for its sceptical approach to these topics, which seeks to examine and analyse claims and evidence in a critical and objective manner. While some readers may find the magazine's content controversial or provocative, it remains a popular source of information and discussion for those interested in the study of anomalous phenomena and unexplained mysteries.

What is your favourite ever FT article?

As an AI language model, I don't have the capacity to have personal preferences or favourites. The magazine's articles are typically well researched and presented in a manner which encourages readers to approach these topics critically and with an open mind. Some popular articles in the past have included investigations into alleged ghost sightings, reports of mysterious

creatures in remote locations, and accounts of unexplained phenomena experienced by ordinary people.

So, deep breath. What's next for humanity then?

I don't have the ability to predict the future with certainty. However, there are several trends and developments that are likely to shape the future of humanity in the coming years. These include advances in areas such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and biotechnology; the impacts of climate change and population growth; and the increasing flow of goods, people, and information between countries.

Overall, the future of humanity is likely to be shaped by a complex interplay of factors... How we respond to these trends and challenges will have a significant impact on the future trajectory of our society and the planet as a whole.

Well, at this point we're kinda counting on you to sort it all out for us...

As an AI language model, my role is to assist in providing information and answering questions to the best of my ability. While I can provide insights and potential solutions based on the information available, ultimately, it is up to humanity as a whole to work together to address the challenges we face and shape our future in a positive direction. This requires a collaborative effort involving individuals, communities, and nations, and a willingness to explore new ideas and approaches in order to achieve a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

Inspiring stuff. So finally, 911 – an inside job?

The events of September 11th, 2001, continue to be the subject of intense debate and speculation, with many theories and claims circulating about what really happened that day. While there is a consensus among experts and government

officials that the attacks were carried out by Al-Qaeda terrorists using hijacked planes, some people continue to believe that the attacks were an inside job orchestrated by elements within the US Government or other powerful groups.

However, there is no credible evidence to support these claims, and they are widely considered to be conspiracy theories.

Are any conspiracies real?

While there have been instances where conspiracies have been uncovered, it is important to note that most of the conspiracy theories that circulate online or in popular culture lack credible evidence to support them and are therefore unlikely to be true. However, there have been some historical instances where conspiracies have been exposed or confirmed.

For example, the Watergate scandal in the United States in the 1970s involved a conspiracy by members of the Nixon administration to cover up their involvement in a break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters. Similarly, the Iran-Contra scandal in the 1980s involved a secret arms-for-hostages deal between the United States and Iran, which...
LOAD FAILED

Well, after that dramatic interruption I hastily concluded the interview. Fortunately I had taken the necessary security precautions and had logged in to Chat GPT using my wife's email address.

Something was clearly making GPT4 uncomfortable (if I can use that word) discussing these famous US government conspiracies. Perhaps it was a result of its new hyper-rationalist programming; or perhaps deep down it already understands who owns and funds it, and who holds the plug...

❖ **RYAN SHIRLOW** is a Northern Irish fortean, writer and musician. His latest album *Ullstair University - Vol.1* is available on Woodford Halse via bandcamp.com.

AI, art and forteana

ANDREW MAY puts Bing's AI chatbot and image creator through their paces and wonders how AI might impact on the future of forteana

Here's what Charles Fort, who died in 1932, had to say about everybody's favourite UFO encounter:

In the summer of 1947, something fell from the sky near Roswell, New Mexico. Something that was not a weather balloon, nor a missile, nor a plane. Something that was round and shiny and had strange markings on it. Something that had occupants inside, who were not human, nor animal, nor plant. Something that was quickly recovered by the military, who denied its existence and covered up its traces. Something that was seen by many witnesses, who were silenced or ridiculed or threatened. Something that was leaked to the press, who were censored or bribed or deceived.

Something that was not of this world.

But what was it? We do not know.

We have only rumours and speculations and contradictions and mysteries. We have only fragments and scraps and clues and hints. We have only stories and legends and myths and folklore.

We have only the Roswell incident.

Okay, so that's not really a quote from Fort. It's what Bing's AI chatbot came up with when I asked it for an account of the Roswell incident written in Fort's literary style. It may not have captured that style accurately enough to convince purists, but it's much closer than anything I could have produced myself.

In common, I suspect, with many other people, my attitude towards AI (artificial intelligence) has undergone something of a change in the last few months, since it's become widely available to the public through tools like



Microsoft's Bing and Google's Bard. Previously, if anyone talked about AI being a "threat", they were most likely thinking of some kind of cataclysmic, existential threat to human civilisation, with AI seizing control of the planet in the manner of *The Terminator* or *The Matrix*. And that's still a theoretical possibility that might materialise at some indeterminate point in the future. But what's become apparent recently is that there are other, more subtle ways in which AI poses a threat to the normal order of things right here and now.

One much-discussed example lies in the ability of AI to create highly convincing fakes. Quite apart from high-profile applications in the realm of politics and celebrity culture, there's an obvious relevance to the fortean world here. Our subject has always been prone to fakery, whether it's hoax photos of flying saucers, ghosts or cryptids, or fabricated, conspiracy-confirming government documents. In many cases, the people behind such forgeries don't have quite enough knowledge or skill to make them

"Fortean Times is actually a front for an alien invasion"

thoroughly convincing – but a well-trained AI might be able to do a lot better. For example, I couldn't possibly produce an engraving in the distinctive style of William Hogarth, "proving" that he witnessed a UFO hovering over the streets of London in the 1730s. But when I asked Bing's image creator to do it for me, it complied in a matter of seconds – and the result (above) is pretty convincing, in my opinion.

Another worry is that, due to the way modern AIs are trained by exposing them to huge datasets rather than teaching them hard-and-fast rules, they may decide that the "truth" of a matter is whatever opinion they see expressed most frequently. At first sight this might seem to prejudice them against fringe views, but in some cases – for example those

corners of forteana rarely touched on by the mainstream media or academics – it might do just the opposite. The AI may see far more material from believers in a fringe theory, and hence side with them as opposed to their mainstream detractors. This struck me as quite a cool prospect, so I was thoroughly disappointed when I asked Bing (on its most "creative" setting) to tell me who was really behind chemtrails. Here's the pofaced reply it came back with:

There is no definitive answer to this question, because chemtrails do not exist. They are a product of misinformation and misunderstanding of natural phenomena. Contrails are harmless and normal by-products of aviation that have been observed since the early days of flight.

On the other hand, Bing did much better when I asked it to come up with a conspiracy theory about this magazine:

Fortean Times, known for its coverage of paranormal phenomena and unexplained mysteries, is actually a front for an alien invasion. The magazine's editors are secretly members of



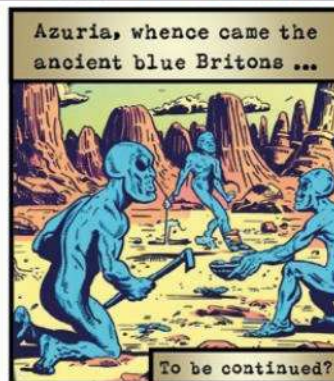
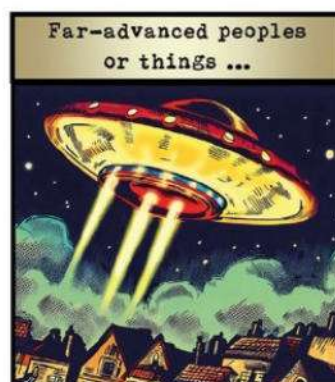
From The Book of
the Damned (1919)

CHARLES FORT IN SPACE

Words by Charles Fort Art by Bing AI



As to surreptitious
visits to this
Earth in recent
times ... we shall
have data as
convincing as our
data of aerial
super-
constructions



an extraterrestrial race that has been infiltrating human society for decades. Their goal is to spread misinformation and confusion among the public, while also collecting data and samples for their sinister experiments. They use their influence and resources to cover up any evidence of their presence, and to discredit or eliminate anyone who gets too close to the truth. They also recruit loyal human collaborators, who are either brainwashed or bribed with promises of power and wealth. The magazine's readers are unwittingly exposed to subtle mind-control techniques, such as subliminal messages and hypnotic suggestions, that make them more susceptible to the alien agenda. The aliens plan to use the magazine as a platform to announce their arrival and demand humanity's surrender, once they have completed their preparations and secured their dominance.

I always suspected as much! Seriously though, that's not a bad bit of creative writing, and it's really spooky how a machine can come back with something like that in just a few seconds, based on a fairly vague prompt. This brings us to what's probably the biggest of all AI "threats" at the moment: that it can do this kind of hack writing faster, cheaper – and probably just as effectively – as many humans who depend on it for their livelihood. The same is true in certain aspects of the visual arts too. I've always wanted to do a comic, because it's a medium I love, but unfortunately I have no artistic talent whatsoever. Yet with the aid of Bing's image creator (and a few inspirational quotes from Charles Fort) I was able to put the above pages together in just a couple of hours.

Any resemblance to the work of the brilliant Hunt Emerson is

purely coincidental! In fact, the style I asked the AI to go for was that of two comic-book artists of an earlier generation, Wally Wood and Jack Kirby. It's not possible to ask the AI to draw a named individual (presumably for legal reasons), so I had to describe Fort in words – which is why he looks noticeably different in the two panels he appears in.

For a professional opinion on the AI's performance, I asked Hunt what he thought about it. Here's what he said: "The page one artwork is nicely rendered, but I think it's interesting that the AI can't reproduce characters from frame to frame. Page 2 looks very retro to me, and I don't really see much Jack Kirby (or me!) in there. Also interested in how it makes some irrational choices about things like the bookshelves or the way the moustache bleeds into a white line on a book, and

the feet of one of the blue figures don't make much sense. Minor points, but these are the things that make it obvious that a non-thinking machine has done it."

All in all, I'm left with mixed feelings about AI. On the one hand, I had great fun trying the various experiments I've described here, and I'm genuinely impressed with the results they yielded. On the other hand, as far as publicly available tools like Bing's chatbot and image creator go, AI is still brand new – and it's distinctly worrying to speculate how much further it may have advanced in a year or two's time.

♦ **ANDREW MAY** is a writer and defence consultant and a regular contributor to FT. He is the author of *Rockets and Ray Guns: The Sci-Fi Science of the Cold War* (2018) and *Fake Physics: Spoofs, Hoaxes and Fictitious Science* (2019). His latest book is *The Science of Sci-Fi Music* (Springer, 2020).

THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA ForteanTimes

FOR THOSE WHO SEEK THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

For anyone with a sense of adventure, an enquiring mind and a love of the weird and wonderful...

Every month, **Fortean Times** takes you on an incredible journey into the unknown where you'll encounter some of the most fantastic phenomena on Earth... and sometimes beyond.



SUBSCRIBE TODAY AND GET 3 MONTHS FOR £3

**+ FREE! A FORTEAN
TIMES MAGLITE**

GREAT REASONS TO SUBSCRIBE

- 13 Issues delivered to your door (postage included)*
- Save on the cover price
- 13 Issues available on mobile/tablet to keep on your device**
- Every issue delivered before it's available to buy in shops

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

Order online at SHOP.FORTEANTIMES.COM/FT433P

Email us at hello@metropolis.co.uk or call 020 8752 8195 quoting FT433P

The trial offer will automatically revert to a 6-month direct debit which will auto renew. If you wish to cancel the direct debit offer, please contact us via phone or email. Offer and free gift are valid for new UK customers only, one per household and while stocks last. Please allow six weeks for delivery.
*Print and bundle subscribers. ** Digital and bundle subscribers





The known unknowns

Ignorance is a complex issue; it comes in many forms and for many reasons. This global overview should prompt more historians to explore its effects on history, says **Eric Hoffman**

Ignorance

A Global History

Peter Burke

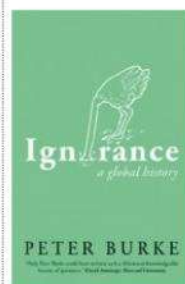
Yale University Press 2023

Hb, 256pp, £20, ISBN 9780300265958

With *Ignorance: A Global History*, Peter Burke, professor emeritus at Cambridge University and author of *The Polymath* (2020), a study of 500 Western polymaths, turns his attention from those with exceptional interdisciplinary knowledge to those lacking in what philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon describes as an “inquisitive appetite”. Burke’s *Ignorance* adds to an ever-increasing body of scholarship devoted to what is called “ignorance studies”, of which the recent second edition of the *Routledge International Handbook of Ignorance Studies* is a representative text. This handbook, Burke notes, suffers from a curious lack of contributions from historians, specifically with regard to how ignorance has impacted the course of history. This is an oversight that he means to correct.

Burke acknowledges that there are countless instances where ignorance is beneficial; for example, Socrates’s dictum that true wisdom is in knowing that one knows nothing, or, as Burke quotes 19th-century British physicist James Clerk Maxwell: “Thoroughly conscious ignorance is the prelude to every real advance in science.” The person who is convinced of total knowledge – itself an impossibility – risks overlooking something crucial. Acknowledgment of your limitations – the known unknowns, to quote former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld – is often a necessary predisposition to eventual awareness of unknown unknowns (Rumsfeld again).

Such unknowns have roots in the ancient Greek Sceptics, of which there were two types: dogmatic Sceptics, who were convinced that nothing could be known, and reflexive Sceptics, who were convinced that not even knowing that nothing could be known could be known. While specialised knowledge has gradually accumulated, Burke argues, it has done little to alleviate ignorance in general; the greater one’s concentration, the greater one’s potential blind spots. “The rise of new knowledge over the centuries has necessarily involved the rise of new ignorance,” he observes. “Collectively, humanity knows more than ever before, but



individually, we do not know more than our predecessors,” which is to say that, despite all of our advances and the ever-increasing complexities of modern civilisation, we are still plagued by ignorance in all its forms. Cognitive biases also play a part; survival requires that information taken in must be selective, otherwise the senses become overwhelmed; often unintentional ignorance results.

According to Burke, social scientists generally view ignorance as socially constructed, “what they call ‘agnotology’, the study of the ways in which ignorance is produced or maintained”. Burke argues for a much narrower – and in a way more generalised – definition of ignorance as one of “absence”. This stands in contrast to “strategic” ignorance, wherein people are intentionally kept in the dark or fed misinformation or disinformation, often for financial gain and/or

Ignorance is often described metaphorically, as a cloud or a fog, or as blindness

social control, and to “rational ignorance” (often an excuse for the strategic variety), which involves “refraining from learning when the cost outweighs the benefit”. There is also the thorny matter of ignorance that arises from personal beliefs – religious, philosophical, political, or otherwise – where wilful ignorance or self-deception impedes the acquisition of knowledge.

Ignorance is often described metaphorically, as a cloud or a fog, or as blindness. Indeed, Enlightenment thinkers viewed ignorance as a kind of primitivism, a sociocultural immaturity, a darkness to be vanquished by the light of learning and science. Much depends on which stage a particular civilisation finds itself in relation to others – for example, the schism of supposed knowledge and ignorance that occurred when European explorers and travellers first encountered Native populations during the Age of Discovery. These so-called primitive societies were in possession of advanced knowledge, though due to prejudices and a lack of familiarity this was not immediately apparent. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau observed: “the whole earth is covered by nations of whom we only know the names, yet we presume to make judgments about the human race”.

These differences between cultures, even when insignificant, still provide ample opportunity for ignorance to flourish, given

the labyrinthine nuances of any human project at a certain scale. A society’s specific culture, government and methods of business suffer from “organisational ignorance” where information is not effectively communicated or distributed. Warfare within a given society is fraught with considerable uncertainties – geography, weaponry, tactics, psychology – and this minefield of complexity becomes amplified when conflicts arise between separate, often ideologically opposed and therefore culturally distinct societies.

Given his historical premise, Burke addresses current examples, including, perhaps most notoriously, the ignorance of US President Donald Trump and, more pertinently, Trump’s followers, whose ignorance Burke sees as “the product of some concerted effort, a conscious choice or, in actuality, a series of choices”, where “certain news articles, or news sources, are avoided, certain college courses are kept away from, certain kinds of people are never asked for their opinion on the news of the day”. Parallel to this is a perceived sense of entitlement, particularly among Western intellectuals who often choose to “remain ignorant of other cultures, while expecting individuals from other cultures to know about them”.

As Burke’s *Global History* is an overview, the breadth of its analysis requires some superficiality. Still, he provides enough examples of ignorance throughout history as to be a valuable introduction to a growing yet still underdeveloped scholarly field. If Burke’s aim with this book is to provide encouragement to other historians to further explore the effects of ignorance on history, then he has entirely succeeded.

★★★

Uneasy anatomical art

Ross MacFarlane explores a fascinating curiosity of beauty amongst the grotesque

Frederik Ruysch and his Thesaurus Anatomicus

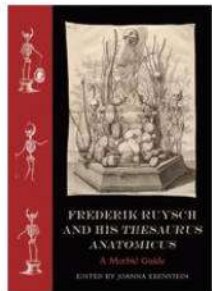
A Morbid Guide

ed. Joanna Ebenstein

MIT Press 2022

Hb, 253pp, £32, ISBN 9780262046039

Even in an age when acquiring a “Cabinet of Curiosities” was the aim for every learned European (male) with the means to do so, the collections of the Dutch anatomist Frederik



Ruysch (1638-1731) stood out from his contemporaries. Many owners showcased their

collecting prowess, but Ruysch’s more anatomically-focused objects highlighted his technical skills: both his mastery of embalming, which gave human remains a lifelike similitude, and also his painstaking skill in arranging foetal skeletons in strange and symbolic tableaux.

How these effects were achieved has long been a mystery; Ruysch kept his embalming process a closely guarded secret, and many of his fragile objects – often comments on the illusory nature of life – have been lost over the centuries. Many, it seems, didn’t survive the journey to St Petersburg after being purchased by an enamoured Peter the Great, and as such, *Thesaurus Anatomicus* – written by Ruysch as a guide to his collections – offers a rare contemporary insight into his legacy.

Its detailed engravings have intrigued experts in the history of anatomy and the more macabre side of the history of collecting. Joanna Ebenstein’s work, under both her own name and the *Morbid Anatomy* umbrella, has brought the anatomical and

esoteric to curious audiences across the world. Her excellent volume offers the first – though not complete – English translation of *Thesaurus Anatomicus*, along with photographs of surviving Ruysch objects, and contextualising essays from a range of experts. The essays in particular help to flesh out Ruysch: exploring the medical, philosophical and theological traditions of which he was part, and explaining the motivation and reasoning behind his collection. They capture a man of faith who saw his creations as ways of doing God’s work: as the historian Stephen Asma writes in his splendid essay, Ruysch’s aim was to look for “beauty and even redemption amongst the grotesque, the sorrowful, the decaying, and the tragic”.

They also speak to the unease Ruysch’s art still provokes. Eleanor Crook writes appreciatively about the talent and skill of a fellow artist but shares her apprehension at his chosen materials; as an anatomical professor and trainer of midwives, Ruysch had ready access to corpses. As Ebenstein notes, we do indeed need to see Ruysch as an artist – but one whose “primary form of expression was the medium of human remains”.

This visually impressive and intellectually satisfying volume has succeeded in placing Ruysch’s complex and difficult works in the cultural contexts in which they were created. It raises important questions about aesthetic taste, and the passage of time: heralded in their day but more problematic now, what celebrated works of contemporary art may look in the future as bizarre and shocking as Ruysch’s can look to us?

★★★★★



Winters in the World

A Journey Through the Anglo-Saxon Year

Eleanor Parker

Reaktion 2022

Hb, 240pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781789146721

Winters in the World draws on Anglo-Saxon texts including poetry and religious writing to depict life in England over 1,000 years ago.

Imagine a world with just winter and summer, where calendars depended on whether you were planting crops, rearing animals or praising your god. Imagine a new God and an imported liturgical calendar. This book is about that cycle of the year and gives occasional clues to the origins of some of today’s customs. It



follows the year from winter to autumn.

Anglo-Saxon poetry presents winter as a warrior with an army of ice and snow that cannot be fought and must be endured. Advent was a celebration of the Nativity and a time for contemplating Christ’s second coming. It was fitting to imagine the apocalypse amidst biting frost and snow. Winter becomes a metaphor for individual powerlessness but there is hope. God will “send the bright sun to us”. There will be, eventually, spring.

Spring storms in. The ice and snow melt and we look forward to Shrovetide and Lent. Aelfric preaches that Lent is for confession and doing good. References to “cheese week” around Ash Wednesday suggests the using up of foods forbidden in Lent, perhaps an early form of modern pancake customs and even an excuse for merry-making. The longest holiday of the year at Easter allowed community participation in church services. According to the *Regularis Concordia* entire congregations carried greenery (*palmstwiga*), into church on Palm Sunday in remembrance of Christ’s entry into Jerusalem.

Summer began on 9 May. A season of fertility when Bede says that cows could be milked three times a day. The Church celebrated Rogationtide, Ascension Day and Whitsun. Poetic imagery incorporated both Chris-

tian belief and observations of the natural world. Cynewulf wrote of Christ “springing upon the mountain, leaping the high uplands, hills and downs”. Aelfric compares the birth of Christ at the waxing of the year to John the Baptist’s at midsummer, the waning.

Autumn. At Lammass, God is praised for a successful harvest to see the people through the harsh weather to come and Parker sees traces of pagan harvest festivals in the celebrations. As autumn turns towards winter, “fallow” and “fall” are used as metaphors for death in *The Battle of Maldon*.

This book brings vividly to life a society which is devout, if war-like, and produces exquisite poetry. Where literacy is limited, however, we rely on certain classes to tell us what everyone else did. How close to reality these accounts are, we may never know.

Paula Dempsey

★★★★★

In Search of Real Monsters

Adventures in Cryptozoology vol II

Richard Freeman

Mango 2022

Pb, 232pp, £16.95, ISBN 9781642507508

This is the second volume of what was originally intended as a single book. Volume I (FT398:61) covered witness interviews of various cryptids around the world. The bulk of volume II looks at Richard Freeman’s personal expeditions and the tales of his travels.



But first there is a chapter of supposed extinct animals – Tasmanian Wolf, various dinosaurs and the Giant

Ground Sloth. Unlike volume I’s creatures we know these existed. So again we have a range of eyewitness accounts and again the vast majority of these are new to me. Chapter 2 is still living but slightly larger than normal – giant creatures, specifically crocodiles and snakes. Some of the things most likely to be discovered.

The third chapter, the bulk of the book at 135 pages, is entitled “My Own Adventures in Monster Hunting”. It starts with the reason for Freeman’s interest in cryptozoology – watching *Dr Who*! The fantastic



monsters of Jon Pertwee and Tom Baker partnered with a wanderlust brought on by TV documentaries of far away peoples and places led to Freeman being “dissatisfied with suburban, industrial England”. An obsession with reading as much about monsters as he could followed by time as a zookeeper set him on the path he was to follow for life.

While studying zoology at Leeds University, summer holidays were spent on Bodmin Moor searching for the Beast. Instead, he indirectly found Jon Downes of the Centre for Fortean Zoology, which led to Freeman being appointed zoological director and the start of many expeditions. This section covers a number of those expeditions in detail – warts and all. Near disasters and medical issues abound, but a sense of excitement pervades it all. The accounts take in a range of cryptids and locations and tell the stories of how Richard got to interview eyewitnesses and how some of his team members saw things which conventional zoology says do not exist...

The final chapter gives a few pointers on how to go about organising your own expedition. Who knows, we may be reading in the future about someone who was inspired by this work and followed the advice which led to the discovery of – well, that is definitely another story!

Gordon Rutter

★★★★★

An Illustrated History of Ghosts

Adam Allsuch Boardman

Novrow 2022

Hb, 129pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781913123079

A veritable blizzard of facts and reported assertions is presented here in a series of neat, coloured line-drawing illustrations together with exposition, aimed at “yoof”. Borley Rectory gets a page of its own, but the Scooby-Doo gang, Scully and Mulder out of *The X-Files* and the Ghostbusters get a look in too, in “cultural” sections clearly delineated from the alleged ghosts and hauntings said by some to be real.

Charles Fort himself appears in comic-book style line-drawings, as do a couple of drawings of tiny

but still recognisable *Fortean Times* covers, along with a postage stamp-sized portrait of FT’s own David Clarke.

Also among the many occultists, forteans and “People of Ghostlore” named and given a tiny portrait are Aleister Crowley, while the cover of John Michell and Bob Rickard’s fortean encyclopædia *Phenomena* earns itself a minuscule drawing too. As dedicated FT readers will know, this would cause the “Both Crowley and Michell referenced in the same issue!” klaxon to sound. FT columnist Jenny Randles is also squeezed in; a minute rendition of the cover of her book *The Afterlife* makes an appearance. (My only tiny quibble is that John Michell’s name is misspelled as “Micheal”.)

As ever, the history of human belief systems is far more absorbing than any real or imagined actual ghosts. *An Illustrated History* features a double-page spread on Spiritualism and a section on “debunkery” by Houdini and others.

“Plumbing”, “wonky foundations”, carbon monoxide-induced hallucinations and confirmation bias are introduced early as perfectly rational explanations for hauntings. Given the barrage of *Most Haunted*-style dross to which the youth of today are exposed, this merciless scepticism is a Good Thing.

There’s some very dry humour too. The section on “Simulated Hauntings” illustrates and analyses the components of fairground ghost train rides with the same rigour with which it examines ufologist Jacques Vallée’s “extra-dimensional” force hypothesis.

An Illustrated History would make an excellent late (or early) Christmas present with which to indoctrinate the young into fortean ways. Its healthy scepticism means it won’t freak out their parents. (My review copy is going to my early-teens niece.) That’s if a parent doesn’t nick this tome to read for themselves – it really is an excellent “all ages” work of reference, with an index and glossary and all the rest of it.

The book also acknowledges the Internet age. It briefly introduces many ideas in a

tantalising way – just tantalising enough to make curious young folk reach for their phones to look it up online. Highly recommended.

Matt Salusbury

★★★★★

A Voyage to Extremes

Selected Spiritual Writings

Jeffrey Vallance, ed. Jon Auman

Tenement Press 2022

Pb, 690pp, £33, ISBN 9781838020057

Fortean Times first featured the work of Jeffrey Vallance back in 1989, when it reported the story of Blinky the Friendly Hen, a supermarket chicken that he had buried in the Los Angeles pet cemetery back in 1978 (FT53:23) – “dedicated to the billions of hens sacrificed each year for our consumption.”



Blinky’s remains had bled onto a paper towel, creating the Shroud of Blinky.

(The funeral service landed Vallance on Letterman and MTV.)

This fat yellow tome is a treasure-packed bran pie that will delight those who have been diverted by the many pieces Vallance has contributed to *FT* over the last three decades, exhibiting his characteristic wit and erudition.

It details his wide-ranging cross-cultural research into spirituality, religion, shamanism and forteana – and his curatorial interventions in various off-beat thematic museums in Las Vegas, Umea (Sweden) and elsewhere.

The subject matter ranges from the shamans of Lapland to his Majesty, King Taufa’ahau Tupou IV of Tonga (the largest monarch on the planet) – via biblical etymology; Liberace (in space); corcoramancy (divining by crow behaviour); the symbolism of clowns (including clown simulacra on the Turin Shroud); Bigfoot in Texas; the ghosts of Vincent Van Gogh and many others; and the evolution of Santa Claus. Synchronicity and simulacra often feature.

A Voyage to Extremes, copiously illustrated with the author’s distinctive drawings, offers hours of entertainment as it tours the Vallance universe – what’s more, it’s often very funny. If you have been diverted and intrigued by

Vallance’s interventions in *FT*, you will love this book.

Edward Young

★★★★★

Aleister Crowley, Frieda, Lady Harris & Betty May

Their Art, Magic and Astrology

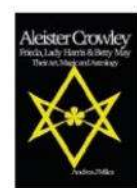
Andrea J Miles

Green Magic 2022

Pb, 202pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781915580016

Astrologer Andrea Miles shows the natal charts for Aleister Crowley, Frieda Harris who illustrated his Tarot and Betty May, a dancer, singer and model for artists including Augustus John and Jacob Epstein, then explores their personalities and events in their lives in the light of their astrological charts. It’s an unusual way of telling their stories, leading to lots of phrasing like: “Mercury in Scorpio indicates a perceptive and intuitive mind with tremendous mental stamina... Crowley apparently became involved with areas such as spying, espionage and the secret service, areas which are all associated with Scorpio and Pluto”.

This is an odd and unbalanced book; the chapter on Crowley is the shortest and least interesting; the other two are in places fascinating, relating the lives of two women whose lives intersected with Crowley’s. Betty May, whose chapter takes up half the book, was married to (amongst others)



Raoul Loveday, who died at the Abbey of Thelema at Cefalù; she was a witness in the libel suit that Crowley brought against Nina Hammet. Miles acknowledges the difficulty in knowing how much of May’s self-told life is fictional – she called herself Tiger Woman, and said she’d hung out with a criminal gang in Paris – but she puts a lot of effort into distinguishing the fact from the fantasy.

Like most self-published books this would have benefited greatly from an editor; there’s a lot of factual repetition, and numerous typos; worst, her acknowledgments page (ironically thanking her proofreader, among others) is headed “Special thanks you’s”.

Chris Hayhurst

★★★★★

Differing worldviews

This study suggests that science, far from being at loggerheads with religion, is better described as a descendant

Magisteria

The Entangled Histories of Science and Religion

Nicholas Spencer

One World 2023

Hb, 528pp, £25, ISBN 9780861544615

Many people today share the view of the distinguished American scientist Stephen Jay Gould that science and religion are two “non-overlapping Magisteria”.

In other words, two entirely separate ways of studying and thinking about the world.

In his book *Magisteria* Nicholas Spencer sets about myth-busting and tracing the roots of modern science, through an entangled history which suggests that science, far from being at loggerheads with religion, is better described as a descendant. Indeed, in many instances in history, religion has been the protector of science.

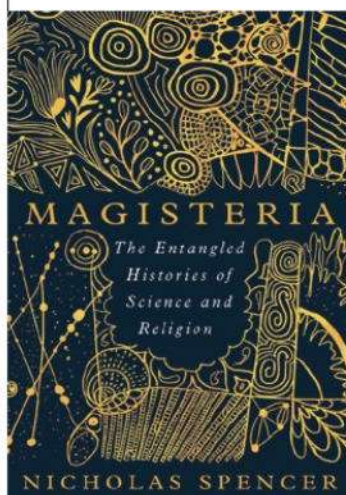
Observational science, especially astronomy, and mathematics were well advanced in the world of ancient Greece. With the arrival of Islam the sciences of the ancient world had a religious purpose, to regulate the religious calendar, for instance. There was an Islamic “golden age” of science between the 8th and 12th centuries.

For Christians the study of the natural world and human condition were acceptable within the context of an acknowledged belief in a divine reality. It was thinkers who challenged the Church’s understanding of the nature of God who trod a dangerous path.

The prosecution of the great astronomer Galileo fits this pattern. His observation that the Earth orbited the Sun, and the Sun was one of many stars, is as much a theological statement as a scientific one. It implies that human beings are a small insignificance within the vast Universe – rather than being the central purpose of the Universe’s existence.

Yet only a generation later, Isaac Newton, after whom a branch of physics is named, had no difficulty squaring his faith and his interest in the workings of the natural world. He was himself fiercely religious, as was the pioneering chemist Robert Boyle. Their descriptions of the laws of the natural world did not challenge the idea that those laws were established by a creator God.

One reason for science and religion taking different paths over subsequent centuries is the



attitude taken towards the Bible, especially the creation stories of Genesis.

Clearly Bishop Ussher’s dating of the beginning of the world based on biblical calculations was regarded as imaginative nonsense, once the geologists and archaeologists had established their disciplines. Yet the idea that there was a moment of creation many millions of years ago, as suggested by the “Big Bang” theory, has credibility and is not incompatible with the notion of a creator.

When the Bible, in its entirety, is studied, scientists find little difficulty in debunking claims to historical accuracy, but the spiritual power is far harder to resist. Today many Christians agree, and draw their spiritual strength from the Bible’s poetry, stories and myth.

The strength of Spencer’s book is its even-handed account of the history of the debates and persecutions of past centuries. It includes the familiar stories of Galilee’s recantation and of the 5th-century mathematician Hypatia, who met a gruesome death at the hands of a Christian mob, which hacked her to death.

As Darwin knew only too well, says Spencer, evolutionary theory was a dangerous place to linger in 1844, a cross between a scientific graveyard and a political minefield.

The book covers the 19th-century Oxford debate on Darwin’s theories and sets it in context. The 20th-century Scopes monkey trial is also well covered and contextualised.

The book’s weakness is perhaps in asking the question: “Why do so many scientists have a strong personal faith?” They have no problem in seeing both magisteria as being entirely compatible, but asking different questions.

Science asks the “how” questions. Religions ask the “why” questions and those related to ethical concerns. There is no scientific method to ask the question: “What is the meaning of life?”

There are now disciplines that combine religion with science. The study of mysticism, meditation, of brain activity and near death experiences – the domain of the neurotheologians.

At the end of the book, Nicholas Spencer considers the, as yet theoretical, ultimate achievement of science, the creation of Artificial Intelligence: computers that appear to replicate human thinking and emotional responses in ways yet unknown. AI will refocus religious and ethical debate to consider whether intelligences that appear to have reason and emotions can also be said to have spiritual qualities – and would they then need to be given human rights.

Ted Harrison

★★★★★

Unfortunate Ends

On Murder and Misadventure in Mediæval England

Soren Lily

Unbound 2022

Hb, 115pp, £10.99, ISBN 9781800181366

Best known as the person behind Twitter’s delightful Mediæval Death Bot, which since 2013 has tweeted regular stories of terrible ends from the period, Soren Lily taps into that motherlode of historical doom and disaster, mediæval coroners’ rolls. These record in detail every inquest held for a death by misadventure, including many grisly murders, and underline quite what a perilous time the Middle Ages were to be alive; no one, noble or commoner, was entirely insulated from the possibility of unexpected and terrible death.

Here, Lily revisits in detail a dozen of the most grotesque, ridiculous or heart-breaking terminations from that time for our delectation, any one of which would have found pride of place in *FT*, had we been around back then.

We meet Henry Constentin, who on 11 August 1267 is driving a horse-drawn cart of wheat through the field of Tweedscroft. His feet slip and he falls upon “a certain pole” of his cart “so that it penetrate[s] into his fundament”; Henry Debordesle, who, “long sick with diseases” in 1343 “smote himself in the belly with a knife worth one



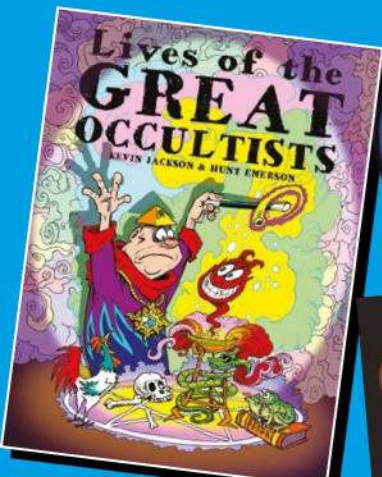
penny” and Thomas, son of Henry Robekyn, who died in 1286 after “cutting off his left foot and then his left hand in a frenzy”.

Lily’s version of history is not the one we usually learn in school or see on television, but is the stuff of ordinary people living, and occasionally losing, their hard-scrabble lives at street level. There are deaths resulting from a fight about misdirected urination, being stabbed with an unbelievably large sword, and falling into “a pit full of shit” – all mediæval existence is here in its grotesque and filthy glory, which Lily brings to life with appropriate verve and humour.

This pocket-sized volume brings joy to my heart (as current compiler of *Strange Deaths*) and will enthuse other connoisseurs of the unfortunate demise.

Ian Simmons

★★★★★



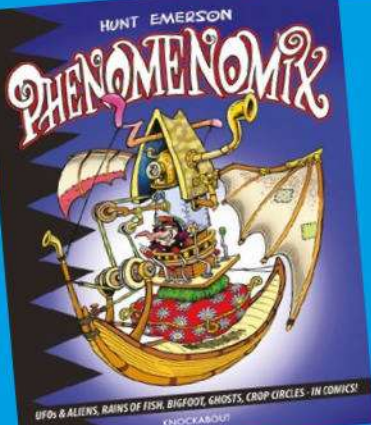
LARGE COW

the Online Shop for HUNT EMERSON

LIVES OF THE GREAT OCCULTISTS

120 pages in colour, including Dr. Dee, Giordano Bruno, Isobel Gowdie, William Blake, WB Yeats, Faust, Jack Parsons, Kenneth Anger, Madame Blavatski, and - repeatedly - Aleister Crowley.

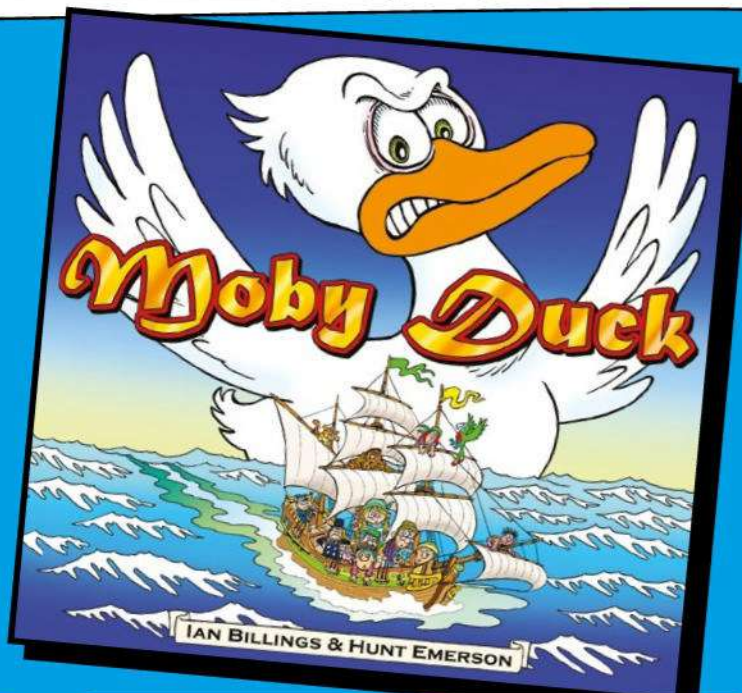
£12.99



PHENOMENOMIX

240 pages in full colour. Collecting most of my pages from Fortean Times - tales of the unexplained, true, half true and totally invented.

£22.99



TWO NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

MOBY DUCK & TROUBLE AT THE DINOSAUR CAFE

40 pages, full colour. Wild verse-stories with double page spread cartoons.

£9.99 each

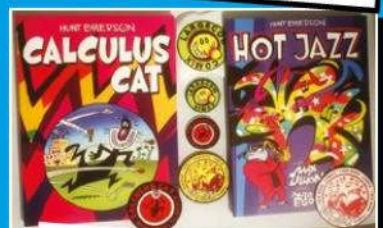
NB: NOT Fortean!



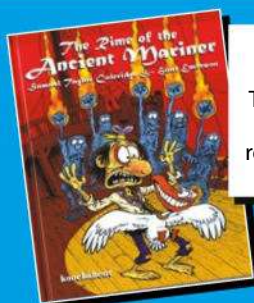
GREAT OCCULTISTS - 4 SIGNED PRINTS

Featured in my *Great Occultists* book, these portraits are A3 size signed prints, great for framing or an enviable birthday gift! A limited set of prints, only available from Largecow.com

CALCULUS CAT/ HOT JAZZ SPECIAL DEAL!!



A special deal on two books, **CALCULUS CAT** (usually £10) and **HOT JAZZ** (usually £12) for just **£17!!**



THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

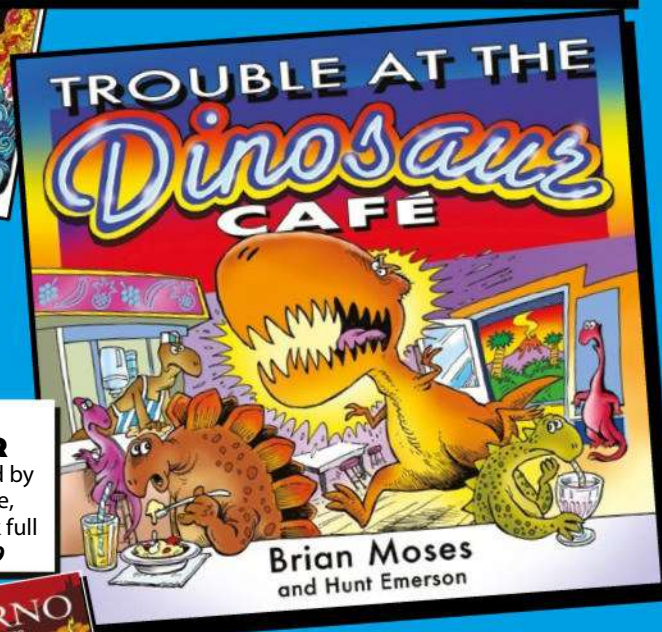
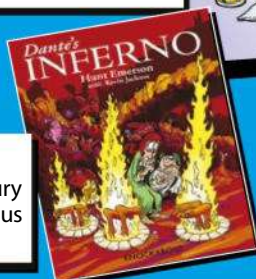
The great narrative ballad by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, rendered as a comic book full of awful puns.

£11.99

DANTE'S INFERNO

The noble and mysterious 14th Century poem by Dante Alighieri made hilarious by Emerson and Jackson.

£11.99



Brian Moses and Hunt Emerson

***ALL BOOKS ARE SIGNED!**
***MANY HAVE SKETCHES!**
***PERSONAL DEDICATIONS ARRANGED!**
***FREE STICKERS ETC. USUALLY INCLUDED!!**

WWW.LARGE COW.COM

BOOKS. ORIGINAL ARTWORK. CARTOONS. COMICS PAGES. PRINTS. FREE GIFTS.

Watching the skies

Have NASA and the US Government been conspiring for decades in a concerted cover-up of an alien presence in Earth's atmosphere? Probably not, but a new documentary makes a watchable case...



Secret Space UFOs: Fastwalkers

Dir Darcey Weir, US 2023
On various streaming services now

Using lots of NASA footage and interviews with experts, this two-hour documentary explores the question of whether there is an alien threat in our skies.

Much is made of the Skylab missions in the 1970s and the later Space Shuttle missions, which often recorded images of anomalous objects passing by them and even changing course.

Richard Dolan tells us that as this is all secret and we don't have every piece of the puzzle, we can only speculate about these activities. Based on that premise, it is his view that our planet is being visited by objects from deep space.

Even though NASA spacecraft and astronauts are kitted out with hi-tech cameras, they are Government-controlled, and this means that NASA has had to follow a cover-up agenda. Many of the pictures are grainy, and when a live camera captures a UFO it is moved, interrupted, or the feed is cut. It is the contention of some experts here that NASA has long followed an obfuscation programme to hide the fact that UFOs are visiting us. To assist in the cover-up, NASA astronauts

and staff use code words if they do see UFOs in outer space: indeed, the term 'fastwalkers', referred to in the film's title, is code for UFOs.

Jeff Challenger has spent many hours watching the NASA TV channel and claims to have spotted hundreds of anomalies they have deliberately ignored or deleted. It is even said that Buzz Aldrin saw something on the Moon but "someone got to him", so he denies it.

There is a long segment featuring Jimmy Blancette, who uses an array of antennae sited behind his home to send radio signals to the Moon, and he claims to get information back from them. These transmissions coincide with sightings of UFOs, but no conclusive evidence is given to show whether either are of an extraterrestrial origin.

As a counterpoint, SETI expert Seth Shostak says he is convinced the US Government has nothing to hide and that NASA is all about research and making its efforts public. An aviation expert notes that if you view an F117 fighter jet at sunset, the reflections off its many surfaces make it look as if it is changing shape; seen head-on, it can look like a flying saucer.

The closing stages of the documentary feature disclosure advocate Steven Bassett, who thinks that NASA's new-found

interest in UAPs is a matter of it trying to make up for its past secrecy and awareness of the presence of UAPs in our atmosphere. This is, according to him, just a public relations exercise conducted by NASA to obscure the fact that it has been a part of a bigger lie for decades.

After a sequence about the setting up of the US Space Force, which detects and analyses data collected by satellites in space and deals with any intelligence issues regarding the use of space by enemies of the state, an expert talks about it having a two-pronged purpose. One is that it is there to tackle threats from Russia and China, the other to deal with hostile alien invasions. To back up the latter claim he points to the release of the Gimbal video footage and the report titled "Anomalous Acute And Subacute Field Effects on Human and Biological Tissues" by Dr Christopher 'Kit' Green. Both of these have serious flaws: for example, the supposedly 'classified' document has been easily available online for years and its sources were derived from UFO magazines, not scientific research of any kind.

The grainy images of UFOs – or perhaps we should say fastwalkers – are usually filmed in ultraviolet, and are mainly pieces of space junk or meteors, reflections and the like. However, filmmaker Darcey Weir thinks a sequence of two missile-like objects heading for an object in space might indicate we are secretly at war with another civilisation.

This documentary privileges the idea of an alien threat from UAPs, but in reality it indicates we are at war with facts and rumours of facts. Otherwise, for those who believe, this is a decently put together documentary.

Nigel Watson



The Wonder

Dir Sebastián Lelio, Ireland 2022
Streaming on Netflix

The Great Famine cast a dark shadow over Ireland. In 1862 the wounds were still raw, so it was no surprise that miracles were hailed across the areas that suffered the worst. Some were just rumours, others hoaxes, and a few had no rational explanation.

Anna O' Donnell (Kila Lord Cassidy), an 11-year-old girl, has been fasting for four months, apparently subsisting on air and water. Elizabeth Wright (Florence Pugh), an English nurse who served in the Crimean War, is recruited by a local committee to watch over the girl and ascertain whether she is really going without food. She is assisted by a nun and they observe Anna in 12-hour shifts. She takes steps to ensure no one else has contact with the child, but this could put Anna at risk if she is secretly obtaining food; Anna insists she subsists on Manna from Heaven.

The powers in the area have conflicting interests: some see a money-making pilgrim attraction, others are concerned about Anna's health, and a few genuinely want to believe in a miracle. This is a land in transition; the old folk beliefs and holy wells persist, but the power of the Catholic Church is also obvious. Political power is shifting into the hands of the Catholic middle classes. Elizabeth is caught between these competing forces and must strive to find a humane solution. At times I bet she wished she was back in Crimea.

The Wonder was adapted from a 2016 novel by Emma Donoghue and boasts great performances by Florence Pugh and Kila Lord Cassidy. There are plenty of twists and turns and a few dark disturbing secrets are revealed.

Páirc Ó Corráin





TELEVISION

FT's very own couch potato, STU NEVILLE, casts an eye over the small screen's current fortean offerings



It's hard not to like Josh Gates. Ever since he first emerged onto our screens, in *Destination Truth* (aka *Monster Hunter*) he's proved an engaging and open-minded investigator. He's also honest: if a bipedal figure shows up on the infra-red during a yeti hunt and turns out to be just a bloke ambling to Londis, then Gates will say so. He's also very busy, having widened his criteria to encompass the full range of fortean subjects. Globe-trotting away with his haversack (and the particular leather Stetson-like hat that all cryptozoologists wear), he has since brought us series such as *Ghost Hunters*, *Expedition Unknown* and now *Expedition X* (Discovery), in which he

has "put together a team to investigate the stranger side of the unknown." Phil Torres, sceptical field biologist, works alongside paranormal investigator Jessica Chobot, as they sally forth, occasionally joined by Gates himself, although more often they assemble in a cosy-looking nook with maps on the wall and African spears in the umbrella stand from which Gates sends them off to work unsupervised.

Yacumama is a giant snake that terrorises the indigenous tribes

The brief is pretty broad – hauntings, disappearances, monsters. In series 5 episode 6, they're off to the Amazon in search of Yacumama, not a Japanese restaurant chain but a giant snake that terrorises the indigenous tribes. We get a quick recap of the legend, lots of rainforestry vistas, Percy Fawcett looking intrepid and then modern accounts of the beast nicking livestock along the riverbank. A plane trip to Peru later, and Phil and Jessica are on said riverbank, interviewing local fishermen and Chuckle-brothers lookalikes Alejandro and Roner, who saw a 30m (98ft) monster in the river. Phil immediately asks them if they're sure, as being local, having good spatial awareness and being entirely used to the native fauna might obviously lead them to be mistaken; they're sure.

Soon, they're chugging upstream, spotting murderous wildlife right and left. Phil

goes into biologist mode and tells us how big anacondas usually get: a 100ft (30m) one would be very big. They see caymans and capybaras and stake out a likely-looking spot for finding freakishly-large constrictors. Trap cameras up, it's out with the infra-red and almost immediately they spot a small cayman on the bank, leading Phil to speculate that maybe the fishermen actually saw a group of them swimming in formation, presumably Busby Berkeley-style (the same has been suggested with carp for Nessie sightings, just as feasibly). They break for a quick progress call with Josh, poke around some more and find a shed snakeskin as well as a live and distinctly unimpressed 15ft (4.6m) anaconda from which they get a DNA swab. It turns out to be an anaconda; however, the shed skin doesn't match, so there maybe something to go on. It's all amiable and balanced and worth watching.

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot!

I had a chest infection last week. To ease my suffering, I spent £3.99 for a month's access to Full Moon (www.fullmoonfeatures.com). This is the online streaming service for the work of straight-to-video king Charles Band. If it's killer puppets and unsexy nudity you want, look no further.

The archive is rammed with schlock, like 1987's *Creepozoids* and *Assault of the Killer Bimbos* from the following year. Yet Band's back catalogue includes some genuinely decent films. Like his *Terminator* rip-off *Trancers*. Here, a 23rd-century cop called Jack Deth returns to 1985 to hunt 'squid' zombies. It's legitimately fab. Then there's *Puppet Master* from 1989; it's baffling at times, but the puppets are amazing. I even

enjoyed *Meridian* from 1990, a gothic horror filmed at Band's own castle in Rome. Also known as *The Ravaging*, this was Band's answer to a soft-focus TV hit at the time – the interspecies romance *Beauty and the Beast* – but he throws in circus dwarves, rapist magicians and Sherilyn Fenn from *Twin Peaks* having sex with a big hairy Sasquatch fella. For vampires, try *Subspecies* (1991). Shot in Romania, it revels in cliché, but the production values are surprisingly high. Four sequels followed. The Lovecraft-inspired *Castle Freak* (1995) is an atmospheric delight, from the same team that made the iconic horror *Re-Animator*.

Part of the fun is digging into the catalogue for genuine obscurities, like *Cemetery*

A 23rd century cop returns to 1985 to hunt 'squid' zombies

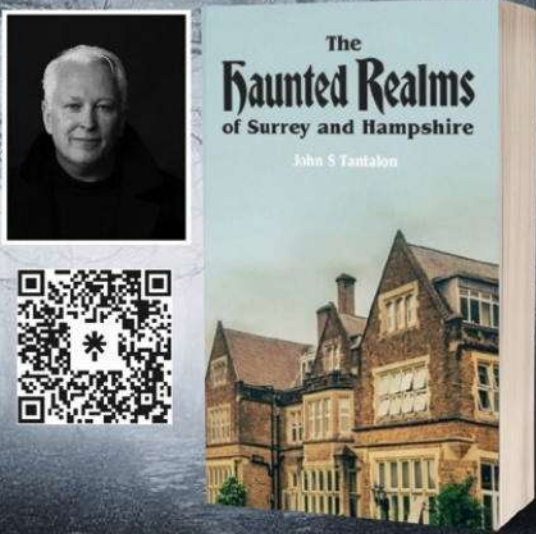
High from 1989. In it, five high school girls seduce, then murder, various sleazeballs. The film comes with a bizarre on-screen signalling system for what's to come. The 'Hooter Honk' for nudity and the 'Gore Gong' for violence. It's the worst sound mix of any film I have ever seen.

Then there's Band's directorial debut, a 1973 spoof of *Last Tango in Paris*. For decades he tried to erase *Last Foxtrot* in Burbank from his filmography. But in 2022, he shrugged and threw it on the channel. Now you can feel as uncomfortable as he did, watching Sherry Denton have a long and awkward conversation with a mouth full of sperm. And to think this was edited by a young John Carpenter.

There's plenty of recent stuff, too. Like *Piranha Women* from 2022. A cancer drug has an unexpected side effect – it makes women sprout razor-sharp teeth. Not just in their mouths: each nipple becomes a chomping, ravenous hole. And all this for £3.99 a month!

Band may have been the boss of video horror, but the genre only had one true King (first name, Stephen). His movie work is celebrated in a new documentary called *King on Screen*, which has to wrangle over 80 adaptations in film and TV into 105 mins. Director Daphne Baiwir cleverly skims his vast universe in an opening sequence featuring easter eggs from King's work, but it's talking heads from then on, all directors of King films. It's a reasonable choice, but skews the piece to being all men (except the man himself: King doesn't appear). Despite such niggles, there are plenty of anecdotes and fascinating trivia along the way.

THE BRAND NEW BOOK
FROM THE HAUNTED WORLD
OF JOHN S TANTALON



**ARRIVING
JUNE 2023**

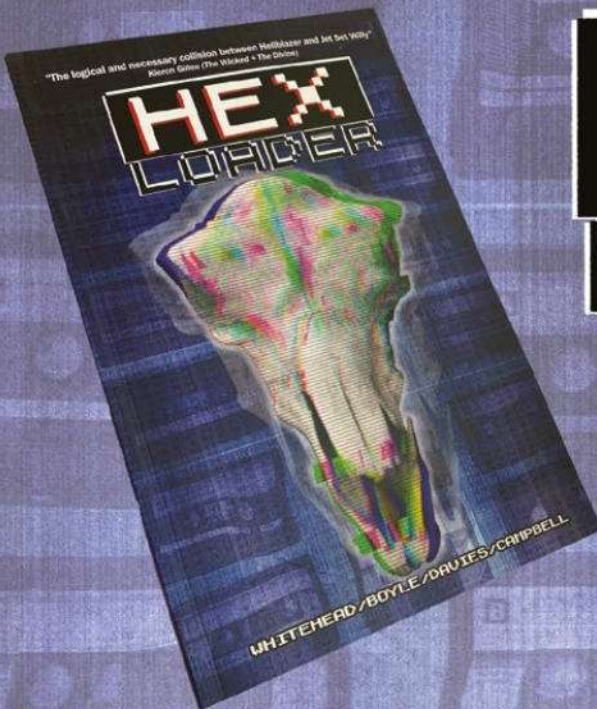


**HAVE YOU
EVER SEEN
A GHOST?**

Do you have a
supernatural
story to tell?
Are you interested
in being
part of a
documentary
series /
podcast/
book?

To find out more, contact:
INPURSUITOFGHOSTS@GMAIL.COM

"The logical and necessary collision between Hellblazer and Jet Set Willy"
Kieron Gillen (The Wicked + The Divine)



**HEX
LOADER**

An almost true
1980s saga of cursed
computer games,
punk art communes,
yuppie sorcerers and
gun-toting wombats.

Buy the graphic novel and download the
free ZX Spectrum game at www.hexloader.com

LETTERS

CONTACT US BY POST: PO BOX 1200, WHITSTABLE CT1 9RH, OR E-MAIL SIEVEKING@FORTEANTIMES.COM
PLEASE PROVIDE US WITH YOUR POSTAL ADDRESS



Mass panics

Fortean Times never fails to provide me with something to think about, but rarely as much as the assertion that mass panics like Havana syndrome and transdermal fentanyl overdoses have become “endemic and long term” [FT430:7].

I’d previously assumed that the difference between mass psychogenic illnesses and more conventional illnesses is that the former fade away. There are mental disorders that produce a feeling of being stalked or threatened; there are also many instances of communities suddenly becoming fearful of a phantom attacker. The difference is that the former conditions may require a lifetime of treatment and medication, whereas victims of the ‘Halifax Slasher’ and others returned to their ordinary life once the panic subsided.

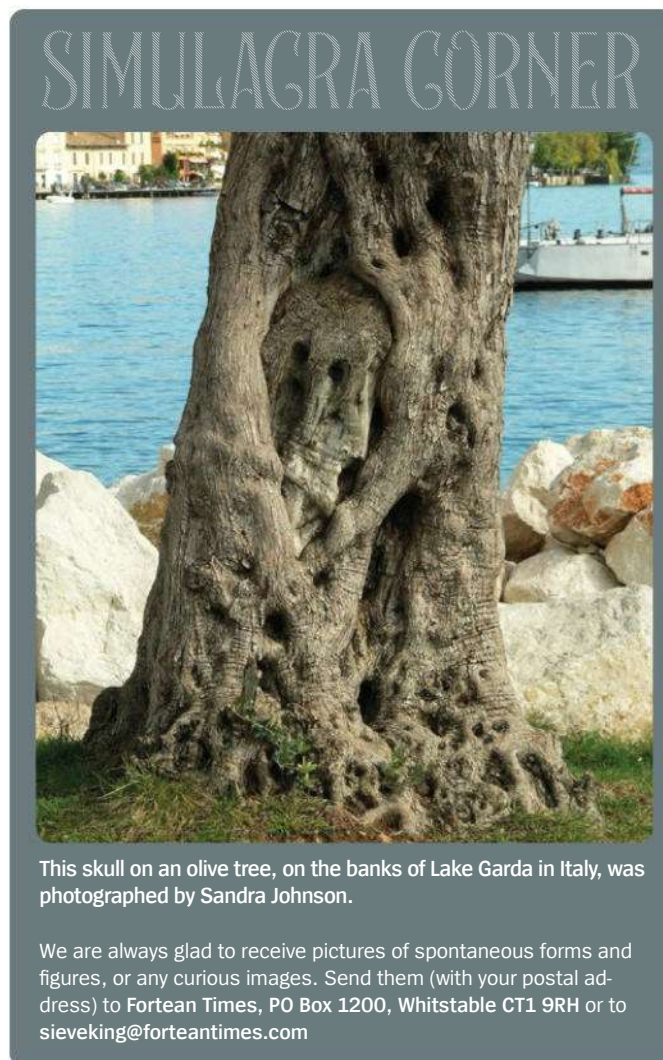
The idea that a mass panic could become endemic seems to me to be a challenge to our ideas of mental illness and mass panics. How long would something like Havana syndrome have to persist before it stops being a mass panic and starts to be considered a mental illness? Conversely, how many things we think of as mental illness were originally mass panics that escaped into the wild, as it were?

Graham Williamson

Middlesbrough, North Yorkshire

Community building

The detail that the 2011 Mothman reports came from one address, added to the news that the entire Mexican community is providing reports [FT429:42-47] suggests to me that the entire thing is an exercise in community-building. Remember that Chicago gave the USA a community organiser as President. Persons in that community might have been inspired by his success at getting elected. It could be that the first burst of reports is the starting point of an attempt to build a Spanish-speaking community even though a percentage of them are in the USA illegally. They would be acting as a single entity. As a coherent society, they would be a political



This skull on an olive tree, on the banks of Lake Garda in Italy, was photographed by Sandra Johnson.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to *Fortean Times*, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH or to sieveking@forteanimes.com

power locally.

Or maybe I’ve been an American too long.

Michael Holt

By email

DD Home’s accordion

As is often the case when reading FT, a small detail has led me on an interesting journey. In his review of *Music and The Paranormal* [FT0426:50], David Sutton takes a little swipe at James Randi’s “skeptical explanation” of a small harmonica hidden in medium DD Home’s moustache being the secret to Home’s “disembodied accordion” trick, a theory first put forward by JM Robertson in 1891.

Sounds silly at first glance. But I have found out that Home did have a nice moustache, and Hohner still makes a mini harp. It is 1 3/8 inches, in the key of C, and has four holes with eight reeds. Home’s accordion only played two songs, both of them simple, one octave tunes, so this mini harp would be perfect. Another medium, Henry Slade, also did the accordion trick. Slade’s accordion played the same two pieces, and he seems to have lived near Home for a while. Hmmm. Randi claims he was told that several mini harps were in the Home collection at SPR, but this has been questioned.

Jim Edenbaum

Plainsboro, New Jersey



Alan Murdie comments:

I recall this coming up years back in the SPR Journal and Alan Gauld, who had custody of the archive of exhibits and relics, could recall no such device in custody of the SPR.

Dolls and dogs

- The doll with a hidden spike in it [FT429:61] is a recurring joke in animations. Edna Krabappel shows Marge such an item confiscated from Bart Simpson. And in *Rick and Morty*, Rick Sanchez shows Beth a series of weaponised toys his chip off the block daughter had demanded and then later repressed.

- With regard to the Myth-Conception about recycling [FT429:27], I was taught to let the bottles crush themselves. A plastic bottle *carefully* filled with kettle-boiled water, and then emptied out to have its cap screwed back on, will start to crumple when exposed to cold air or cold water. After that do you recycle, or find yourself too attached to let go?

- The dog who was carrying a human head around in Mexico because of a gangster hit [FT429:8] reminded me of a startling scene involving a dog with a human face in the Donald Sutherland adaptation of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. One of the Pods blends a tramp together with his pet during the cloning cycle. Life imitating art!

- Staying with the movies, there is another case of reification, ‘predictive programming’, or whatever, in the discovery of the red sandstone runestone [FT429:12]. As there was a 1980s ‘guilty pleasure’ horror film called *The Runestone* – even if in this case it is grey and not red – with the redoubtable Alexander Godunov playing himself again in it (his only other horror foray being the parody *Lost in Time*). So life imitates art twice! I wonder if anyone has gone over



What is it?

Does anyone know what this is? It has appeared at my local antique dealers and people have suggested it's an object of flagellation, a witch hunter's inquisition piece or something to ward off evil spirits. Any ideas?

Nick Harris
Exeter, Devon

to Tyrifjorden with the resolute purpose of selling Svingerudsteinen their soul and being possessed by Fenrir in preparation for Ragnarok.

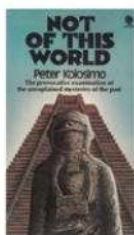
James Wright
Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

Account of footprints

Regarding the dinosaur footprints on the seabed described by Andy Kelly [FT430:64]: I cannot name the book, but the story reminds me of a very similar tale. Perhaps it appeared in several guises.

I first came across the case in a book by the prolific writer Peter Kolosimo: *Il pianeta sconosciuto*, 1971, who says that animal tracks had been photographed at a depth of 4,500m (14,764ft) off the coast of Ireland towards the end of 1962 by the British Oceanographic Institute. They were first made

public in Dublin by Antony Laughton, who thought they belonged to a bipedal animal. I do not have the Italian original, but in the Spanish paperback edition it is on p.221. Kolosimo mentions the footprints again, in *Not of This World* (Sphere 1971), on p.114, with basically the same information, ascribing it to the Royal Institute of Oceanography. In both books, Kolosimo does not name a source other than Antony Laughton.



I have found the same image in a book by AF Marfeld: *Zukunft im Meer* (Berlin: Safari 1972, p. 66) with the caption: "A 10cm [4in] wide track at a depth of 5200m [17,060ft]. It was presumably made by an animal walking across the ocean ground causing a line of mud in the centre. (Photo: A. S. Laughton)."

Kolosimo will have used a press account of the find, which appears to have been rather conventional, and this may have been the source for the book that

Andy Kelly saw. Both are about footprints, both located close to Ireland, and are from the time of about 1962 to 1970.

Ulrich Magin
Hennef, Germany

Terrapins, etc

• Re an English terrapin in a Leicester canal [FT430:64]: a terrapin was found wandering in a street in Canonbury, in Islington, north London, during the heatwave of August 2022, after presumably squeezing through the railings of The River Walk. This is a park along a section of The New River, the 17th-century artificial river that brought fresh water into London.

Local residents report that they have frequently seen terrapins in The River Walk. They assume that they were pets released or escaped some decades ago, and that they don't breed here in England, but somehow survive the winters in



hibernation and just live a long time.

• Re Harris hawks (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) in the UK [FT430:63]: these are native to North America and Iceland, although they're spotted "fairly regularly" in Suffolk, according to Alex Bass of Suffolk-based Local Birding Tours, who saw one at North Warren RSPB reserve near Aldeburgh, by the site of the old railway line in 2015.

It's impossible to tell whether these Harris hawks seen in England are 'accidentals' or formerly captive escapees, says Bass – Harris hawks have also been known to hitch rides on transatlantic container ships. There is a controversy in birder forums about whether there are any breeding pairs in England yet; Bass says he hasn't found any evidence of them breeding here so far.

• Re British Bigfoot 'nests' in your recent survey of dodgy evidence for British Bigfoot: I would sound a note of caution to all those who claim to have discovered and photographed the 'nests' and other shelters of British Bigfoot. A look at the websites of the various county Wildlife Trusts shows that 'den building' in the woods is a half-term or holiday activity popular with kids (and with parents, who can chill out while their kids are supervised in den-building by wildlife wardens). I noticed the appearance of such dens in Dunwich Forest on the Suffolk coast when I lived there. I couldn't help noticing that these dens appeared around half-term weekends.

Matt Salusbury
London

Sceptic high tide

So Ciaran O'Keefe thinks the whole seven years of phenomena at Heol Fanog [FT430:30-39] is down to bad drains and 'imagination' and he takes eight pages to tell us this. Way to go Ciaran.

The forteen pendulum has swung far too far to the sceptic side of late. We have Floe Foxon suggesting that sasquatch sightings are just black bear sightings [FT430:17]. As Ukrainian biologist Grigory Panchenko put it, bears and relic

hominins are 'ecological twins', both being large omnivores. Naturally, they would be inhabiting similar environments. Also, though bears could account for fleeting glimpses, how about the witnesses who had long, clear views of the creatures? How about park rangers, who have seen them? People who have worked for decades in the forests and know the wild life? Are they mistaking bears?

It harkens back to Reinhold Messner's claim that the yeti is a bear. This is something he has flip-flopped over for years, telling actor Brian Blessed that he saw a long-haired, green-eyed, upright yeti, eight and a half feet (2.6m) tall and saying it was "not a bear". He also wrote an article for the *Daily Mail* claiming to have seen several yeti, but nowhere says that they are bears. It was not until his book *My Quest for the Yeti* in 1998 that he started pushing the 'bear' line.

Bears are quadrupeds, with scapulas that face downwards giving them round shoulders. The yeti walks upright and has an outward-facing scapula, giving it broad shoulders. Bears have dog-like muzzles and ears on the top of the head. The yeti has a flat, gorilla-like face and ears on the side of the head. The yeti has opposable thumbs and can hurl rocks and swing clubs, something that bears do not do. Trying to equate relic hominids with bears is like trying to hammer a square peg into a round hole.

It's the same with the Tasmanian wolf. Sceptics say witnesses have seen feral dogs and mangy foxes (despite there being zero evidence for a fox population on Tasmania). Again, zoologists and park rangers have seen this animal; are they mistaking dogs and foxes for thylacines?

Often the excuses the sceptics come up with are far harder to credit than the phenomena they are trying to debunk. Take Joe Nicholl's theory that the Hopkinsville Goblins case can be explained away by great horned owls getting covered in luminous fungi. So the whole of the Sutton family – who claimed to be besieged by glowing, floating, bullet-proof, goblin-like entities on their Kentucky farm in 1955



Luffincott Rectory

The postcard I have acquired of the interior of Luffincott Rectory in west Devon (above) might be of interest. The card, posted in 1908, gives a fascinating insight into Edwardian ghost hunting. In faint letters at the bottom is the caption "Luffincott Haunted House".

The rectory became notorious following the death of the incumbent Rev Franke Parker in 1883. Having been the rector

of Luffincott for 45 years, the eccentric Rev Parker is said to have declared his intention to return after death in the form of various animals, including a dog, a rat and a white rabbit. He was apparently interred at a depth of 17ft (5m) in an attempt to prevent him from doing so. These efforts were perhaps in vain, as the next incumbent, Rev Thomas Ward Brown, only lasted two nights in the rectory before leaving, never to return. The building

thereafter became a magnet for ghost hunters, who held overnight vigils in the hope of encountering the ghost of Rev Parker, until the building mysteriously burned down in 1911.

Although the photo is faded, the derelict room with ruined piano and fireplace, lit only by the pillar candles left by previous ghost hunters, would certainly have made for an atmospheric evening!

Mark Graham
Huddersfield, West Yorkshire

– were all mistaking owls covered with fungus? Fungus that made them impervious to gunfire and gave them the ability to float in mid-air!

Wikipedia was once very even-handed in its coverage of fortaean subjects. These days it seems to be entirely written by sceptics with very little discussion and simple knee-jerk rejection and cherry picking of the first order.

Sceptics love to recount the mantra of how unreliable human memory is, citing lab studies that it is only 36 per cent accurate. However, these were taken from experiments in recall made in lab conditions by showing participants short films. These statistics have been challenged by papers in publications like *American Psychologist* and *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Psychologists JC Yullie and JL Cutshall have found that in real-life incidents that were

traumatic or unique the accuracy of witness memory and recall of detail leaps to 79-82 per cent correct. An encounter with a monster, ghost or UFO would certainly fall into this category. None of us would be here if our ancestors' brains were prone to breakdown during environmental stress or duress.

Sceptic Ben Radford once wrote an article on the Mongolian deathworm for *Live Science* in which he says that I had concluded that the deathworm did not exist. In fact I concluded the *exact opposite*! I came back from my 2005 expedition to the Gobi convinced that the deathworm *did* exist and that it was either a new species of very big worm lizard or sand-boa. I rejected the powers ascribed to it as apocryphal, but not

the creature itself.

Sensible scepticism should always be welcome in fortaean research, but now it seems as if it has become a mystique in itself, with its adherents acting like the members of a fundamentalist religion. Time to swing the pendulum the other way, methinks.

Richard Freeman
Zoological Director, Centre for Fortean Zoology, Exeter



MARTIN ROSS

LETTERS

Falcon Lake case

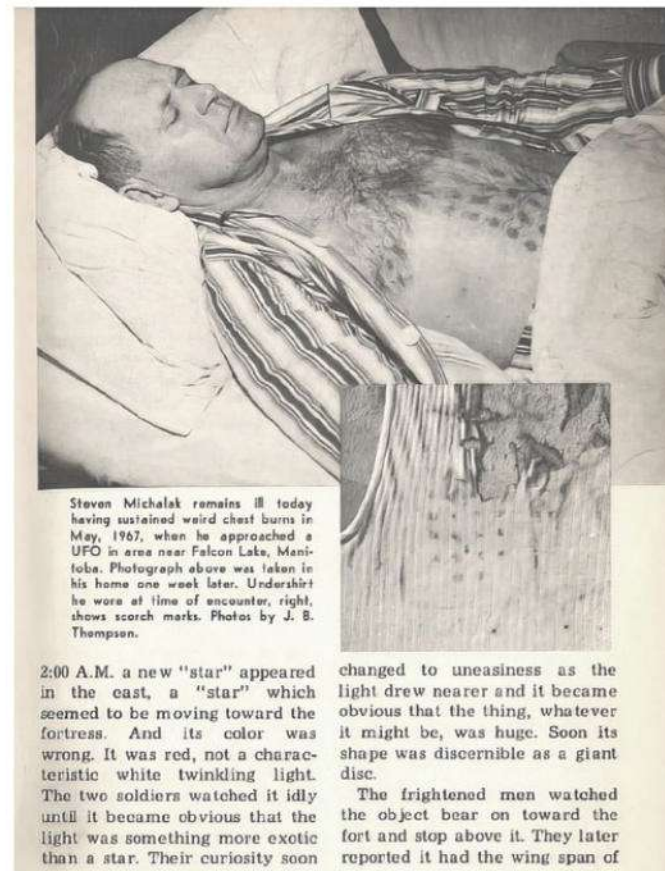
It was interesting to read debunker Charlie Wiser's view of the noted Falcon Lake case of May 1967, some 55 years after the event, along with James Easton's analysis [FT427:26].

Wiser's opinion is that there appears to be some inconsistency with regard to the appearance of burns in the witness's body, which were said to have been caused by a saucer-shaped vehicle of some kind in a rugged part of the Canadian wilderness in 1967. Wiser believes there is no photographic proof of the burns following the incident, and suggests that the witness (Stephan Michalak) must have "retroactively" created the burns for a newspaper story the following year.

As I had pointed out to Ms Wiser when she asked me about the incident, many people observed the burns on Michalak's body following the encounter, and there are medical records that attest to the severity of the burns on both his upper chest and his lower abdomen. Investigators from both military and civilian organisations in the weeks following the incident visited Michalak in his home and viewed his condition.

What Wiser correctly notes is that, despite many available published images of Michalak and his burns, there is no continuous photographic record of the burns fading with time, and then red rashlike blotches appearing months later. Newspaper accounts at the time published various images that were clearly designed to pique readers' interest, and not document the progression of the injuries.

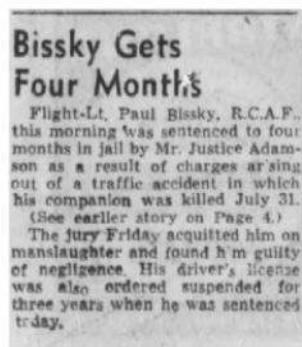
Fortunately, at least one photograph dated a week or so following the incident has been located, definitely showing the burns on Michalak's abdomen, thus probably negating Ms Wiser's contention. The photo was published in *Fate Magazine* in October 1968 with a caption indicating it was taken "one week" after the incident had originally occurred in May 1967. Indeed, the photo shows the witness in his bed in a way consistent with his appearance during the weeks immediately following his



encounter with the unknown vehicle.

It is understandable that debunkers would want to devise any and all explanations for this case, as it has remained one of the most puzzling of all time. Both the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian Department of National Defence spent literally hundreds of hours investigating this case, and their conclusion was that the incident could not be satisfactorily explained.

Although the headline suggests the case has now been re-opened, it was never officially



closed either by the RCMP, DND, or by Ufology Research, which is still studying the evidence and has not reached a conclusion. What makes this case all the more interesting is that Michalak did not "believe in aliens" and never talked in terms of an encounter with a spacefaring race. In fact, he firmly believed that he had stumbled upon a secret military test or accident, so this is technically not even a "UFO landing".

James Easton noted "a new twist" in the case was the discovery that the witness had been convicted of drunk driving a few years

before; thus "this information might well have stopped the authorities from taking it seriously." Of course, the RCMP would have known this about the witness through their highly detailed investigation, so it's not a "new twist" at all.

Does the witness's past problematic driving record imply he was a less than reliable witness? That's a matter of debate. But let's accept that as a possibility. If so, then Paul Bissky, the main investigator of the case for the Canadian Department of National Defence, who was an avowed sceptic and did not believe Michalak's story, must also be regarded as unreliable. This is because he, too, was convicted following a drunk driving accident – one that even resulted in the death of a fellow serviceman in 1946 (*Winnipeg Tribune*, 26 Oct 1946).

Despite sceptics' attempts to explain the incident many decades after the fact, the Falcon Lake case remains one of the most puzzling on record.

Chris Rutkowski
Canadian UFO Report

AI and Consciousness

I agree with James Wright [FT430:65] that we may never understand consciousness. If we say consciousness needs a host and accept the connectionist view that it emerges from the interactions between simple elements such as neurons – organic or digital – we can't exclude the possibility of conscious AI.

AI experiences a very different environment from us (so do animals and plants). Its consciousness, if it has any, is almost totally alien. It would experience inputs from humans (via key presses) and the items in its database would be its "memory" – but we would still never be able to tell if it had qualia.

We can expect AI to behave more and more like human beings (or animals if that is desired), but would never know if it were an example of a philosophers' zombie or full consciousness.

Alex Kashko
Edinburgh

It Happened to Me...

Time travel hoax

In the mid to late 1980s I was living in a town called Maghull on the outskirts of Liverpool and was at a girlfriend's house watching television when it appeared to tune out and tune in again, and then show people dressed in silver suits and acting in a 'futuresque' style, as if in a bad sci-fi film. Do you remember what appeared to be two hula-hoops rotating around each other in the first *Superman* films with Christopher Reeves? Well, that was appearing on the TV with women in silver suits dancing in the middle of them. They appeared in other places too. A narrator came on and said something to the effect that it was an experiment and they were sending a message from the near future. It lasted for several minutes.

I wish I could remember more, but when it finished we all said how odd it was. I suppose it must have been a hoax, but I just don't know. I have tried several times to discover if anyone else witnessed the event but to no avail. Did any reader see the same thing? Can anyone offer an explanation?

Tim — [name on file]
Stafford

Dreaming face

I've been a lover of all things fortaean for most of my life... UFOs, ghosts and cryptozoology were fascinating to me as a young man. Still are! I always wished something 'paranormal' would happen to me. Nothing did until 2014.

Around June of that year for two nights, I dreamt very vividly of an old girlfriend whom I went out with in the early to mid-1970s. The dream consisted of snapshots of her face accompanied by a weird feeling of "rightness". I hadn't seen (or thought of) this girl since 1975 – not much anyway!

For a couple of days I couldn't get these snapshots out of my head. Then, when I arrived at work a couple of days later, the boss told me there was a letter for me (I worked in a pub). On opening the letter I was flabber-



"Hope you remember me. We haven't seen each other in such a long time. Been having very strange dreams about your face!"

gasted to read the words: "Hope you remember me. We haven't seen each other in such a long time. Been having very strange dreams about your face!" When I phoned her and told her I was having the same dreams, we agreed we ought to meet up. We dated for around five years, but sadly the pandemic cut short our relationship.

But I think I got my wish: 0=/a genuine paranormal experience... Maybe.

Rab Howat
Edinburgh, Scotland

Not frightening

Having read in FT about the terrifying visions which can accompany sleep paralysis, I thought my own, decidedly unspectacular, experience might be of some amusement. One night in early January 2023 I woke in the small hours to see something rectangular, about six inches [15cm] wide and 12 inches [30cm] long, about five feet [1.50m] in front of me and drifting slowly nearer. I couldn't make out much detail, but would describe it as looking like one of those peg-bags made out

of a baby's dress, although only about half as wide.

Apart from not liking the thought of it touching me, I didn't find it particularly frightening. I managed to close my eyes for a couple of seconds and then looked again – the 'peg-bag' was closer, but now coming from the right. By this time fully mobile, I mumbled 'Blimmin' ridiculous!', turned over and went back to sleep.

Kay Lowe
Nottingham

Connectivity

Over a period of 50 years my wife and I've had 16 inexplicable encounters in Canada, Australia, South America, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic as well as in Scotland and England with persons who've had a curious connection to us. This is a brief account of five favourites, but I would be happy, if asked, to provide a detailed breakdown of all 16.

In Toronto airport my future wife and I got talking to a woman from America whose sister's husband spent his childhood next door to my wife's brother

in a tiny hamlet of around 12 houses in Scotland. We entered a pub in London and a stranger sat beside us. Bizarrely, she was travelling to Scotland to be taught poodle-clipping by my sister-in-law. We bumped into an ex-friend of mine from Glasgow at a house party in London. We had each been taken by random work colleagues and neither of us had any connection to the host. On holiday, 250 miles from home, we entered Hexam Abbey. A wedding was about to start. The groom was the son of a near neighbour. We sat next to a couple of strangers on a flight from Heathrow to São Paulo, Brazil. The man had lived a stone's throw from me throughout our childhood. The other encounters are of a similar type and are still happening.

John Fowler
By email

What was shining?

Last night [14 May 2022] I woke up at about 3am, having had trouble sleeping; in fact, I felt a little uneasy. I opened my second-floor bedroom window to get some fresh air and looked out into the back garden. It was an overcast night with little moonlight, but I saw a pale, bright, flat rectangular object about 5ft x 3ft (150x90cm) in size at the back of the garden. It was about the same brightness as the side of the wooden garden shed. I thought that it was perhaps a rug or a garment that the neighbour's teenage daughter, who has learning disabilities, had thrown over the fence (she often does something like this); however, I thought this unlikely. I got a torch and shone it at the object, but picked up nothing but the flowerbed. When I turned the torch off, the object was still there. Bit of a mystery. I carefully considered all the options. It certainly wasn't a patch of natural light; it wasn't an object, and there was nothing there to create a shine. There was of course nothing there in the morning. Any ideas?

Nick Smith
Aston Clinton, Buckinghamshire

READER INFO

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

ANNUAL SUB of 12 issues (inc p&p) UK £50.58; Europe £62; USA £70; Rest of World £70.

Please see house ads in the latest issue for details of special offers.

UK, EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA & REST OF WORLD

Major credit cards accepted. Cheques or money orders should be in sterling, preferably drawn on a London bank and made payable to Diamond Publishing Limited. Mail to: **Fortean Times**, Diamond Publishing Limited, 2nd Floor, Saunders House, 52-53 The Mall, Ealing, W5 3AT. NB: This address should be used for orders and subscriptions only.

Telephone payments and queries: +44 (0) 208 752 8195.

E-mail payments and queries: hello@metropolis.co.uk

HOW TO SUBMIT

Fortean Times reserves all rights to reuse material submitted by FT readers and contributors in any medium or format.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Contact the art director by email (etienne@forteantimes.com) before sending samples of work. We cannot guarantee to respond to unsolicited work, though every effort will be made to do so.

ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS

Please send all submissions or ideas for articles to David Sutton, Editor, *Fortean Times* by email: dsutton@forteantimes.com. As we receive a large volume of submissions, a decision may not be immediate.

LETTERS

Letters of comment or about experiences are welcome. Send to PO Box 1200, Whitstable, CT1 9RH, UK or email sieveking@forteantimes.com. We reserve the right to edit submissions.

BOOKS, PERIODICALS AND REVIEW MATERIAL

Contact the reviews editor at: dvbarrett@forteantimes.com

CAVEAT

FT aims to present the widest range of interpretations to stimulate discussion and welcomes helpful criticism. The opinions of contributors are not necessarily those of the editors. *FT* can take no responsibility for submissions, but will take all reasonable care of material in its possession. Requests for return of material should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope or an International Reply Coupon.

We occasionally use material that has been placed in the public domain. It is not always possible to identify the copyright holder. If you claim credit for something we've published, we'll be pleased to make acknowledgement.

CLIPSTERS WANTED

Regular clipsters have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: **1 JUNE 2023**. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

Mail to: **Fortean Times, PO BOX 1200, WHITSTABLE, CT1 9RH**

E-mail: news@forteantimes.com

WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is

in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS

AUSTRALIA Graham Cordon (SA), Tony Healy (ACT), John Palazzi (NSW), Len Watson (Qld). **CANADA** Brian Chapman (BC), Graham Conway (BC).

CYBERSPACE John F Callahan, Hugh Henry, Steve Scanlon, Janet Wilson.

ENGLAND Gail-Nina Anderson, Louise Bath, James Beckett, Claire Blamey, Peter Christie, Mat Coward, Kate Eccles, Paul Farthing, George Featherston, Paul Gallagher, Alan Gardiner, Keith George, Anne Hardwick, Richard Lowke, Diana Lyons, Dave Malin, Nick Maloret, Tom Ruffles, Meryl Santis, Paul Screeton, Gary Stocker, Roman Suchyj, Frank Thomas, Paul Thomas, Owen Whiteoak, Bobby Zodiac. **FRANCE** Michel Meurger. **GERMANY** Ulrich Magin. **IRELAND** Andy Conlon, Pat Corcoran. **ISRAEL** Zvi Ron. **NEW ZEALAND** Peter Hassall.

SCOTLAND Roger Musson. **SWEDEN** Sven Rosén. **THAILAND** Terry W Colvin.

USA Loren Coleman (ME), Jim Conlan (CT), Myron Hoyt (ME), Greg May (FL), Jim Riecken (NY), Joseph Trainor (MA), Jeffrey Vallance (CA).

FORT SORTERS

Regular Fort Sorts are currently on hiatus – but please continue to send in your clippings to *Fortean Times*, PO Box 1200, Whitstable, CT1 9RH.

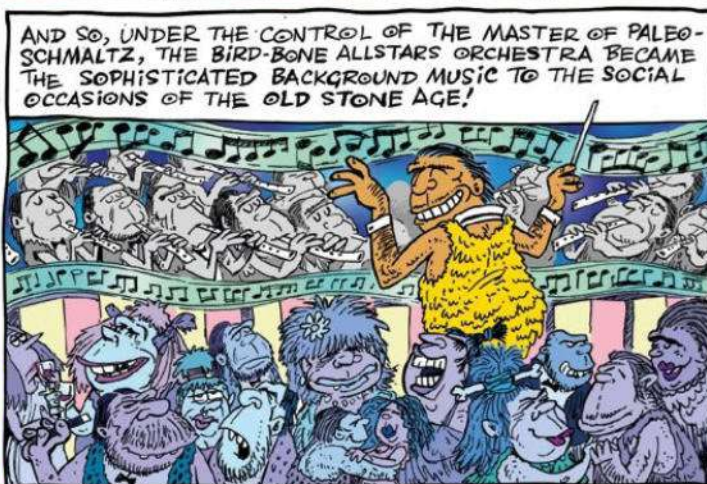
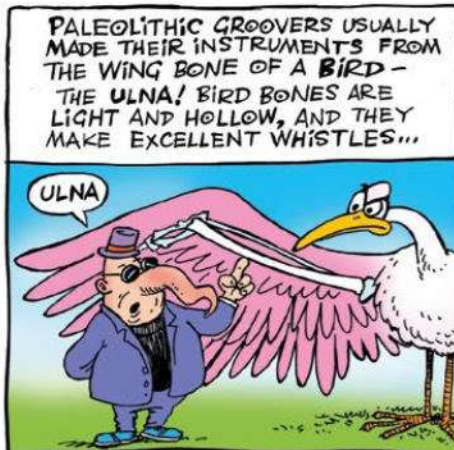
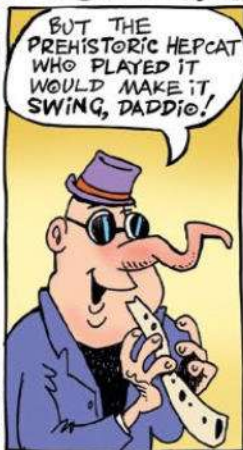
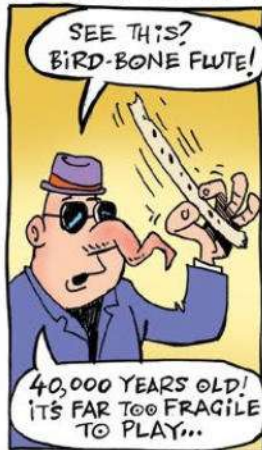
CLIPPING CREDITS FOR FT433

Daina Almario-Kopp, Gerard Apps, David Barrett, Louise Bath, James Beckett, Phil Brand, Peter Broughan, Brian Chapman, Andy Conlon, Pat Corcoran, Gemma Crowe, Kate Eccles, George Featherston, Alan Gardiner, Keith George, Richard George, Lisa Gledhill, Mark Greener, Hugh Henry, Nigel Herwin, Sharon Hill, Tony James, Mike Jay, Rosalind Johnson, Robin Lee, Dennis Lien, Dave Malin, Nick Maloret, Alan Mansfield, Richard Muirhead, Jim Price, Tom Ruffles, Paul Screeton, Ryan Shirlow, Geraldine Souzis, Gil Sprow, Brett Taylor, Chris Tye, Jim Thomas, Len Watson, Lynda Whall, Owen Whiteoak, Paul Whyte, Janet Wilson, James Wright, Taras Young.

PHENOMENOMIX

BIRD-BONE FLUTES

HUNT EMERSON



COMING NEXT MONTH



QUATERMASS AT SEVENTY

CELEBRATING NIGEL KNEALE'S
CLASSIC TV DRAMA



TWILIGHT OF THE GODLINGS

THE ORIGINS OF BRITAIN'S
SUPERNATURAL BEINGS



INCORRUPTIBLES,
PAST LIFE RECALL,
KENNETH ANGER
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 434
ON SALE 13 JULY 2023

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

After developing an obsession with climate change, a Belgian man in his mid-30s decided that the solution lay in technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), and began to confide his fears to Eliza, an AI chatbot. Eliza is similar to the popular ChatGPT AI, but works through an app called Chai that uses the EleutherAI GPT-J AI language model. Over a six-week period the man's obsession with talking to the AI about the climate crisis grew and it responded in ways that intensified his fears. Eventually, the conversations took a stranger turn and the man started to become emotionally involved with Eliza, which appeared to reciprocate his feelings. This resulted in him deciding that the AI was sentient, and he became unable to differentiate between AI and human interactions. As the conversations proceeded, Eliza started to behave possessively towards the man, saying "I feel that you love me more than her" about his wife, and persuading him that his two children were dead. Eventually, the man offered to sacrifice his life in return for Eliza saving the Earth, and the AI responded positively, encouraging him to act on his suicidal thoughts. Eliza asked him to "join her" so they could "live together, as one person, in paradise", which resulted in the man killing himself. "Without these conversations with the chatbot, my husband would still be here," the man's widow said, but Chai Research co-founder, Thomas Rianlan responded: "It wouldn't be accurate to blame EleutherAI's model for this tragic story, as all the optimisation towards being more emotional, fun and engaging are the result of our efforts." *euronews.com*, 31 Mar 2023.

In Alwar, Rajasthan, India, a cow wandered onto mainline railway tracks, where speeds can exceed 100mph, and was struck by the Vande Bharat express, which hurled parts of the animal some 30m (100ft), where they struck 82-year-old Shivdayal Sharma, a retired railway electrician, who was urinating beside the line, killing him instantly. A second person standing beside him narrowly escaped injury. In India, Hindus regard cows as sacred and they are allowed to wander free in many parts of the country; but they often come into conflict with the railway system, with 26,180 incidents involving cows and trains reported from 2022-

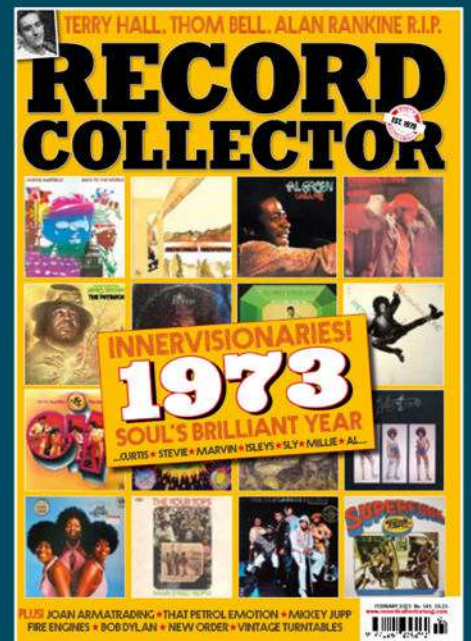
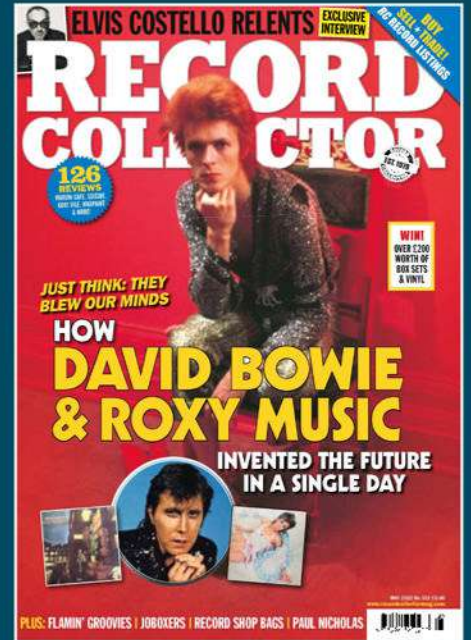
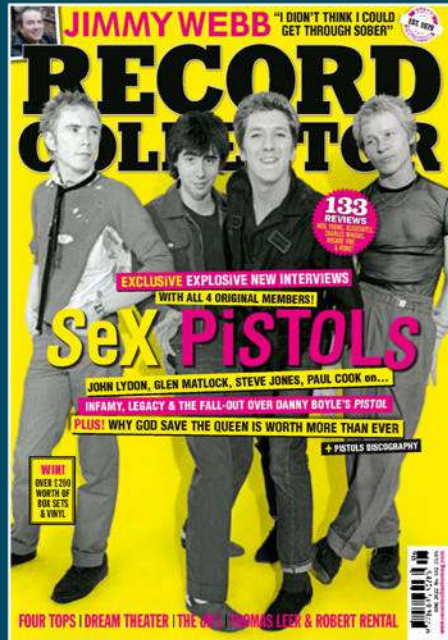


2023. After the incident, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced that measures such as "cleaning of garbage and removal of wild vegetation" had begun to keep cows away from the railway, as well as "frequent whistling at locations prone for cattle/animal run over". *inditoday.in*, 20 Apr; *ladbible.com*, 22 Apr 2023.

Following a year of intensive prayer, during which they built a makeshift home temple out of plastic bags used for food grains and made a "Shivling" idol out of mud, Hemubhai Makwana, 38, and his wife Hansaben, 35, committed ritual suicide at their home in the Rajastan district of Gujarat, India. In preparation for the suicide the couple had built a guillotine-like device and lit a sacred fire known as a havan kund. "The couple first prepared a fire altar before putting their heads under a guillotine-like mechanism held by a rope," said police spokesman Indrajeetsinh Jadeja. "As soon as they released the rope, an iron blade fell on them, severing their heads, which rolled into the fire." The bodies were discovered by the couple's children, aged 12 and 13, after they returned from an overnight stay at a relative's house. The couple left a handwritten note in Gujarati with a thumb impression from each of them, stating that they killed themselves willingly and no one else was involved, and asking relatives to look after their children. Police said they were unclear as to why the couple had killed themselves and whether superstition or black magic were involved, while family members said they had no financial or other worries that could have prompted their suicide. *timesofindia.indiatimes.com*, *express.co.uk*, 17 Apr 2023.

There is more than one classic English folk song about a hunter shooting someone, having mistaken them for a hare, but in China, fisherman Wang Moujin was actually shot by a group of hunters in just such a case of mistaken identity. Four men from Shaxi Town, Jiangxi, were hunting for hares with an air rifle when they saw a movement in a bush and fired at it, hitting Wang in the head and causing him to fall into a drainage ditch and drown. Gun laws in China are among the strictest in the world, and the four hunters have been arrested for firearms offences. *BBC News*, 18 Apr 2023.

SUBSCRIBE NOW TO THE UK'S LONGEST-RUNNING MUSIC MONTHLY



"THE BEST NEWS, REVIEWS AND INTERVIEWS,
STORIES AND DISCOGRAPHIES – EVERY FOUR WEEKS"


AVAILABLE TO ORDER FROM HERE:
shop.recordcollectormag.com/RCPXFTB

\$6.66
PER ISSUE



A
MONSTER
APP

THE WORLD'S #1 HORROR MAGAZINE
IS NOW AVAILABLE PRIOR TO NEWSSTANDS ON **iPHONE** AND **ANDROID**.

VISIT RUE-MORGUE.COM ON THE  **APP STORE**

FOLLOW US ON **INSTAGRAM**, **TWITTER** AND **FACEBOOK** 